

むらさきゆきや

illustration by しらび

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浮遊学園の

Alice and Shirley

アリス&シャーリー

OVERLAP

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Alice and Shirley

アリス&シャーリー



ALIESCHA 26TH FLOOR
CLASSROOM

DIALECT "ROSE GARDEN"

Alice Clockheart

Sakurazaka Shirley
"IT'S ~ SO DELICIOUS! IT'S ~ SO DELICIOUS!"

"WELCOME...
TO MY
WORLD."

"I WONDER
WHAT SHOP
THIS IS
FROM?"

Kosuke Misaki

"EVERYTHING IS IN PLACE... WE NEED TO FINISH IT OFF NOW."

"WE, 'HELP CAT', WILL DEFEAT THE BAD GUYS!!"

"WE NEED TO END IT QUICKLY."



FLOATING ACADEMY CITY
"CANAAN"



- AN INSTITUTION WHOSE OBJECTIVE IS TO TRAIN AND ISOLATE THE USERS OF THE "GLOBALISE" ABILITY.
- IT'S 1000 METERS ABOVE SEA LEVEL.
- ITS AREA IS 24 SQUARE KILOMETERS.
- POPULATION: 19000
- YOU CAN ONLY ENTER AND LEAVE VIA THE AIR TRAIN.

Prologue

The ceiling fell. It was 8:13 AM. Golden sunlight streamed in through the classroom windows.

Kusunoki Masaki's mouth filled with the ensuing dust, making it difficult to breathe. He quickly surveyed the room. Debris from the fallen ceiling was scattered across the desks, chairs, and floor, and a shroud of dust hung in the air.

In the center of it all was a strange, dancing shadow.

Card soldiers with long, thin limbs blew trumpets. From the bells of their trumpets flew geese, and from their yellow beaks came letters of the alphabet. Ducks, parrots, crabs, and hatted mice, all larger than cats, laughed and sang in the chaos.

None of the beings could be real. It was as if they had fallen out of a fairytale.

It seemed they had fallen into the room when the classroom ceiling collapsed.

Masaki had been the only person in the room, so luckily nobody was injured. The room was overflowing with fantastic beings. The lined up desks and chairs were stepped and trodden on, being crushed to the point that they were no longer recognizable.

In the midst of the card soldiers, hatted mice, and the other animals - those irrational, absurd and uncanny beings - was an enormous cat. It was about 6 meters long. The top of its tufty-furred head reached all the way to the top of the joist bay exposed by the collapsed ceiling.

The large cat closed its almond shaped eyes, gave a complacent smile, and lowered its head in what seemed to be a bow.

Between its two triangular ears was the form of a human.

Prologue

The person stood out in a different sense than the strange beings dancing in the middle of the rubble.

Masaki held his breath.

He was so fascinated with the sight that he forgot everything going on around him. *She's beautiful*, he thought.

The girl looked just like a western doll.

Her eyes were a clear, sapphire blue, and she had hair like a bundle of gold thread. Her skin was white as a plaster figure.

She clung to the tufts of fur around the ears of the big cat as it slowly moved.

Although the girl was shorter than Masaki, he had to look up at her since the cat she was perched on towered over him.

She glanced around at her surroundings - then her eyes met with Masaki's.

She tilted her head to one side in what seemed to be curiosity.

"...Who are you?"

Her voice rang out, clear as water.

"Er, I'm Kusunoki Masaki... I transferred to this school today."

"I see. Did I surprise you?"

Prologue

"I was really surprised. I thought I was going crazy for a moment - wait, who the hell are you?"

"...I feel sorry for you."

She didn't answer my question; instead she spoke words of pity.

Masaki was puzzled, so he asked another question.

"Me? Why?"

"You're going to die."

"What!?"

Masaki heard the faint sound of something slicing through the air and turned around.

On the other side of the window—

Chapter 1-1

The first day at a new school, 7:22 a.m.

Masaki landed at Canaan, the floating academy city.

The moment he stepped through the automatic doors, leaving the air conditioned train lobby, he was assaulted by a blast of hot air.

"Jeez, it's so hot..."

When he looked up at the sky, the sun was shining so brightly that he seemed to hear a dazzling sound. The clouds were closer than he'd ever seen them before.

"It *is* a floating city, after all."

Canaan was a huge town floating 1000 meters above the sea. It covered an area of 24 square kilometers, which is about the size of one ward in the Tokyo Metropolitan area. The only way into the city was through the Air Train station.

In front of the main gate was a plaza with a water fountain. Further down the path were department stores, restaurants and recreational buildings. It was a busy and cheerful place.

The second floor was entirely composed of footpaths and plazas, while the ground floor was made up of roads for vehicles. The walkways and roadways were completely separated from each other, which was a rare, cutting-edge design in this era.

—*A cool cup of iced tea would be great.*

No, it's nearly time.

Masaki resisted the temptation and, after enjoying the sights found in the area in front of the station, started searching for the meeting place.

"Erm...was it a triangular monument?"

He couldn't find it.

The person he was supposed to meet up with was his childhood friend.

Seven years ago, before she changed schools, they were in the same class in elementary school. They played together a lot.

The girl who was the best at climbing trees, the fastest swimmer, and would get into a fight with a boy without hesitation was now a high school student like him.

When he thought about how feminine she must have become, Masaki felt his face begin to turn red. He had complicated feelings about meeting up with his childhood friend again. How would he greet her?

Masaki heard the footsteps of someone running toward him.

"Hmm?"

"Masaki——!!"

His field of vision turned white. Something soft covered his face.

A cushion?

Big, soft, and round.

Masaki suddenly felt as though he had the weight of the world upon him.

Once he reined in his confusion, Masaki finally noticed that someone was hugging him tightly.

"I can't..."

"Funyaa!! It's the real one alright. It's definitely the real Masaki!!"

"Too... tight..."

"This smell... I've missed it so much!"

"A-air..."

"Huh? What's wrong, Masaki? What 'cha trying to say?"

"I'm gonna die..."

"Ehh!?"

She finally released him from her arms just before he collapsed.

His face was released from the soft bulge that covered his mouth and nose.

Masaki took in a deep breath.

"The air here sure is delicious."

"Ah, it is. It's because the academy is above the sea and cars that emit exhaust are prohibited."



"That wasn't what I meant, but... Haha... I'm relieved that you haven't changed more than I thought you would. It's been a long time, Shirley."

"Nihaha, long time no see, Masaki! I don't think that there's a single part of me that hasn't changed, though. Look, there's a variety of stuff that's different, right?"

She stuck out her chest proudly, showing it off.

She wore a wide tie and a short-sleeved blouse with a thick collar, as well as a red-checked pleated skirt. It looked like a uniform. Her hair, which had been short when she was a child, now flowed down her back. Her eyelashes were long and her arms and legs were thin.

However, most noticeable was the bulge of her feminine chest, which had an overwhelming, voluminous feel that drew attention to her.

Masaki was shocked by just how much she had grown.

Was it because of her heritage?

Her name was Sakurazaka Shirley. It seemed her mother was an American.

"...Well, of course you've grown."

"I know, right!? I'm 30 centimeters bigger now!"

"E-even if you tell me how much you've grown, I wouldn't be able to tell."

"Hmm, I'm 159 centimeters tall, I think. What about you? You're taller than me now, aren't you?"

Shirley reached out to pat Masaki's head.

He realized that he had completely misunderstood her and involuntarily blushed.

"Ah, yeah, height, right! That's right, we were talking about height, yeah."

"Hmm?"

"My height–"

They continued talking as they walked to school together. Shirley told Masaki about the town that she had lived in for seven years.

This being the floating academic city Canaan, they quickly reached the school.

Masaki and Shirley faced one of the many huge school buildings in the town.

Chapter 1-2

They took the automatic bus from the station's plaza, and fifteen minutes later they got off at the Alrescha bus stop.

Masaki was forcefully dragged along by Shirley, since their arms were linked.

"Look, we're here!"

Masaki's close proximity to Shirley's soft, warm body made it difficult for him to relax.

"I-I got it. I won't get lost, so I'm fine now."

The area was overflowing with students heading to school. They were all wearing the same uniform as Shirley.

Since he was new and his arm was intertwined with Shirley's, everyone's attention was on him.

"Masaki, have you heard about the classes yet?"

"No. I haven't heard anything, so I think you should tell me where the staff room is when we're done. I was given some papers, but I didn't understand anything when I took a quick look through them."

"Alright. Our class is Year 2, Class A. It's on the 45th floor..."

"Seriously, the 45th floor!?"

"Uh-huh. Alrescha goes all the way up to the 60th floor. The cafeteria at the top has a really good view."

Masaki looked up at the building she pointed out.

The glass skyscraper towered over its surroundings. The first floor had an entrance, and the second and third floors had stairs leading up to them. From the fourth floor onwards it was all glass.

"Is it all classrooms!? I thought this was a corporate building, not a school."

"Ahaha. The first 29 floors are special classrooms. The teachers' rooms are on floors 30 through 35, and from there to floor 40 are the first year classrooms. Floors 41 through 45 are the second year classrooms, and up to the 50th floor are the third year classrooms."

"Woah... what's on the last ten floors?"

"The cafeteria!"

"That's quite amazing."

"I felt the same way when I started primary and middle school. Even though I was surprised when I changed schools, I got used to the idea almost immediately."

"That's okay, but... shouldn't we separate our arms now, Shirley?"

"Why?"

"Well... isn't it a little embarrassing? Everyone's looking..."

She gave a carefree smile.

"Nihaha, don't worry too much about it, Masaki!"

"R-really?"

Masaki wondered if he was being too self-conscious.

"Now, let's go!"

"A-ah!"

They passed through the entrance and into a passage wide enough to be called a station concourse, and soon they ended up in a large hall.

This seemed to be the heart of the skyscraper.

In the center of the hall was a curved wall, or maybe it should be called a round column. Many elevators were lined up along the wall, and the words "ELEVATOR PILLAR" were printed on it.

One by one, the students filed into the elevators.

"There's a lot of elevators."

"But wouldn't there be a long wait? Especially during lunch."

"What - because there are a lot of students?"

"Even though there are elevators all the way around the big pillar, everyone is lined up on one side, so the elevators on the other side aren't being used."

"Hahaha... I see."

"Are there stairs as well?"

"Yeah, there are."

"What floor is the staff room on again?"

"The 30th floor—"

"No, no, that's far too high."

"Hm, there's a set of stairs on both the school's east wing and west wing."

"Why does it seem like you want to use the stairs!?"

"Eh? ...Because the stairs are there?"

"This isn't mountain climbing, you know."

While they were waiting, somebody behind them cried, "Wha—!?"

When Masaki turned around, he saw a young man's eyes widening in shock.

The young man seemed to have a strong physique. His hair was short and evenly cut, and his face was quite square. Altogether, his features gave off a grim impression. Everyone turned to catch a glimpse of the scene about to unfold.

He spoke like he wanted to wring every last drop of blood out of Masaki.

"S-Sakurazaka-san! Who is that guy!?"

"Hmm? He's Masaki." Shirley answered indifferently.

Since she didn't say much, Masaki decided to chime in. "I'm Kusunoki Masaki. Today is my first day at this school."

"A transfer student? That means you've just awakened, right? Some new guy is... with Sakurazaka-san's a-arm..."

His shoulders started shaking.

"Who... is he?"

"That guy is Ishounuma. He's in my class. That's all."

"Sakurazaka-san, that isn't all of it, right?"

"That is all."

"Hmph, you're as cold as ever."

Ishounuma was friendly when speaking to Shirley, but was extremely hostile toward Masaki. It seemed like he was ready to attack Masaki at any moment.

"—And? Who are you to Sakurazaka-san?"

Despite having never met Masaki before, he was extremely hostile. Masaki shrunk back from him.

"We're only childhood friends... Hey, Shirley, it's just as I thought. If we're like this, people will misunderstand."

He softly unlinked their arms.

She looked disappointed while she followed what he said.

However, even that wasn't enough to calm Ishounuma. Instead, his eyes became bloodshot.

"Y- you're not using honorifics with her name!? Hey, you! Even though you've been Sakurazaka-san's acquaintance for a long time, it doesn't mean that you can act overly familiar to her!"

"I didn't mean to do that."

"Sakurazaka-san, too! Don't act so friendly towards some low level guy who just awakened."

After hearing Ishounuma's words, Shirley had an angry look on her face.

"What was that? Isn't it strange to choose who you'll get along with by their level?"

"Huh!?"

"Let's go, Masaki. I'm fine with taking the stairs."

"I guess that's for the best."

Masaki didn't like to get into conflicts with other people. It might have seemed hard to go all the way up to the 30th floor using the stairs, but to Masaki it was easier than dealing with Ishounuma.

Ishounuma ground his teeth loudly.

He continued glaring at Masaki until he was out of sight.

Chapter 1-3

"Sorry about that, Masaki. It started getting out of hand," said Shirley as the two climbed the stairs.

"Don't worry about it. It wasn't your fault. He acted a bit strange, but he's only your classmate, right?"

"Of course!"

It didn't look like he believed her.

Shirley looked troubled.

"In Year 1, I didn't have a partner, so Ishounuma asked me to be his."

"Really!? Did you hang around with each other, was it just for the class?"

Shirley swung her arms around angrily.

"That's not it! It's not like that. I had just become a member of the school committee, and the rule is that everyone must have a partner!"

"Ah... the committee."

"But in the end I didn't become his partner - I paired up with someone else. I wonder if he misunderstood because I didn't directly turn him down? Well, it did look like we're pretty close."

"But isn't it better to be on good terms with people, no matter who they are?"

"Yes, but... I didn't mean to cause trouble between us... but isn't it weird that everyone else thinks I'm on particularly good terms with that guy? It's strange! Strange!"

Maybe it's because Ishounuma acts like they're close in order to cause other people to misunderstand.

"I think he's making it worse by talking like that."

"Well... you could have said that he was being a pain, too."

"Did you say that?"

"Yes, many times. I said it plain as day, too!"

Masaki had never been approached by someone of the opposite sex, so he couldn't imagine what it would be like. However, he was able to understand that this was troubling Shirley just by looking at her face.

When she reached the landing, Shirley suddenly turned around to face Masaki.

"I'm just making sure, but you're not having some strange misunderstanding, right?"

"It's alright since you explained everything. Of course I believe you."

"Then, that's fine... for the record, I would never have a special relationship with someone who discriminates by level!"

Masaki had begun to pant by the time they reached the 15th floor.

Masaki lifted his glasses and rubbed his nose.

"Phew... Now that you mention it, you said something about attitudes towards levels... what was that about?"

"Don't worry about it. It's just a number."

"I don't know very much about it... are levels important?"

A surprised look appeared on Shirley's face.

"Masaki, you don't know anything about levels?"

"I only just transferred schools. Didn't I tell you that I didn't understand anything in the transfer documents?"

"Then, what about Dialect and Globalizer?"

Masaki was astonished. He stared intensely at Shirley.

"Amazing. You've really changed from when you were a child."

"Wh-what? What do you mean?"

"I didn't expect such difficult-sounding words to seem so normal to you."

"Huh? Nihaha, is that so? Is it amazing? Really amazing?" Shirley's chest swelled with pride.

"I think it's really amazing. So? What kind of things are Dialect and Globalizer?"

Shirley stiffened. Her face fell.

Then she groaned, "Uuu... What did you say? I feel like shouting 'Yaa!' and whacking you. Nya..."

"Thanks. I've got it now."

"Really?"

"Yeah. You're still Shirley!"

"Nihaha."

Masaki understood - Shirley had disappeared seven years ago because of her ability, and now, thanks to that same talent, he was able to reunite with Shirley.

"...Since my ability is really weak, I doubt it'd be useful for anything even if I study hard and take extra classes."

"It's normal for your power to be weak and your level to be low when you've only just awakened. I'm sure that it'll change soon, so don't let it bother you, alright?"

"Oh, so is the strength of the ability the level?"

"It kinda is. The teacher said something about test results."

"Is it important in this school?"

"Even though the classes are divided by levels, I say that everyone is important... so to me it doesn't matter."

"Really?"

"Well, we all use the same cafeteria!"

"I see. That's a strong argument."

Shirley said that she was in class A. If classes are determined by levels, then would it be the class for the highest level students?

That Ishounuma guy seems to be in the same class as Shirley. Judging from his attitude, he probably has a high level, too.

"You don't need to worry about that. The level is just a number, a number!"

"How is the level decided?

"When I say that you don't need to worry when I'm talking about levels, don't you think it's strange? So, when the time comes for you to need to know about it, you can ask someone then."

"Perhaps, you don't know very much about it?"

"Th-th-th-that's not it."

Shirley's vision wavered, almost causing her to trip. It was especially dangerous since they were climbing the stairs.

"Well, everything will be explained when I get to the staff room." Masaki sighed.

Shirley suddenly placed her finger on the tip of his nose.

She wore a serious expression.

"You only need one thing, and that's a positive attitude! I don't discriminate between people by their levels or anything like that!"

"...Understood."

Shirley gave him a smile as she turned around.

It seemed to be natural that Masaki, who had just awakened, still had a low level. She must have been worried about him. Masaki swallowed his words of thanks instead of voicing them, since he felt their relationship wasn't equal anymore.

There were still more stairs ahead of them.

He decided to change the topic.

"That reminds me... what kind of committee did you get into?"

"My committee? It does lots of different things... we do rounds to make sure that there aren't any rule-breakers and give warnings to people who break the rules of the academy, those kind of things."

"Is it the public morals committee?"

"It's a bit like that. However, our name is much more exciting than that!"

"What is it?"

"It's Breaker." She blushed slightly as she said it.

It's a rather over-the-top name for a school committee. Maybe it has some meaning?

"Well, apart from the name... I think it's Shirleyish."

"Shirleyish?"

"When we were kids, you disliked unlawful things. When it came to dealing with bad guys you seemed stronger than me, but you were just the kind of person who could face them without faltering. Should I call it being an ally of justice or just reckless? At any rate, you acted rashly. Do you remember?"

"Nihaha, I guess it was like that... well, it usually didn't go very well."

"You were clumsy. Maybe it's because you frequently misunderstood things?"

"Only a little."

Her bitter smile had a strange darkness behind it. It was an expression that she never made when they were young.

Maybe she got into some kind of trouble.

She probably couldn't say anything to Masaki since he had just arrived at the school, but–

"Shirley, I think it's best if you do what you think is right."

"Hm? Oh, I think so, too... thanks, Masaki!"

She shook off the dark atmosphere and gave a bright smile that she had since she was an elementary school student.

A high-pitched electronic sound rang out.

The sharp sound repeated, assaulting the ears of the pair and echoing through the wide stairwell.

Shirley lifted up her left arm. On it she wore a silver bracelet that bore an engraved rose adorned with a violet crystal.

The sound stopped once she placed her right hand on it, and a translucent board appeared in the previously empty space above it. This wasn't some kind of illusion - it was purely the product of science.

The holographic screen displayed "EMERGENCY" in large, red letters.

"An emergency!?"

Her expression froze.

"What's wrong?"

"There's trouble in the school building... what am I gonna do? I've got a dispatch request from the committee."

Her eyes darted back and forth between the window and Masaki.

He was able to roughly guess what was troubling her.

"What are you worried about? If it's me, then you don't need to worry. I'm not a child, so I won't get lost in the school."

"Y-yeah."

"You're being called, aren't you? Isn't it an emergency?"

"Yeah."

"Then get going!" Masaki declared firmly. "I can get to the staff room on the 30th floor myself." It wouldn't take much time to get there, as they were currently on the 25th floor.

The doubt disappeared from her face, leaving seriousness in its place.

"Thanks, Masaki. I'll be going now. I'm sorry I wasn't able to show you everything!"

"It's alright. After you're done, I'd like it if you'd show me around some other places - especially the shop where they sell delicious cakes."

"Of course! You really like cakes, Masaki! See you later!"

Shirley gave a nod then ran off.

She's fast!

As he resumed his climb, she rushed into the corridor on the 26th floor with her bracelet held close to her ear.

"It's Shirley. Fill me in on the situation!"

He didn't hear her colleague's response as her footsteps quickly faded down the corridor.

Chapter 1-4

As soon as Shirley left Masaki, he started feeling a little lonely.

However, he was a student who transferred halfway through the school year, so it was natural for him to feel that way.

He silently walked up the stairs.

When he arrived at the 28th floor, he heard a loud voice.

"Hey, look! Ha... ha... did you see it!? That's my power. What do you think now...I can still do it, right!? It's useful, isn't it? So... so... I'll do more!"

It was a shrill, urgent voice.

Masaki heard another voice whispering, but he couldn't understand what it said.

"...More... of course..."

"What!? That wasn't what you said before!! Give it! Hand it over!"

It seemed like they were arguing.

The first voice was angry.

Masaki heard what they were saying from the end of the corridor.

Masaki didn't want to get anywhere near trouble on the first day transferring to the school, but he thought that it would be a shame for him not to see what was happening despite the risk.

He couldn't help but interfere if things got violent, and even if there wasn't a problem it would only be a little detour. He should still have some time to spare.

Masaki left the staircase and entered the corridor.

His footsteps echoed in the silent corridor.

Since he was below the 30th floor, where there were only specials classrooms, and it was the morning, it was quiet.

Someone jumped through the open door of a classroom.

It was a thin, wiry young man.

He was alone.

But I heard him talking with someone else. Is there another person in the classroom?

The boy's breath was ragged. His eyes were bloodshot; his face, pale.

"Y-you... did you hear anything!? What we just said! Hey! Why is there something I dislike here!?"

"No... when I was walking up the stairs, I heard..."

"Shit! Shit! Ah... I get it now! I'll take care of it right away! So, I'll – it's fine since it's a promise, right?"

He directed the last question to the inside of the classroom. As Masaki thought, someone must be there.

The boy glared at Masaki.

"Shit!"

"...Erm... What's going on?"

Masaki could tell that there was something unusual going on, so he kept his distance while talking with the boy.

The other person was about ten steps away.

"I just killed that person... by myself."

"Huh?"

"And now... you, too..."

"Wh-what are you talking about?"

"I'll kill... everything... slice them up! I'll... whatever it is... will be sliced up!!"

The young man broke into a run.

"What's going on?"

"Cut! Sliced up! I'll... raaah! Slice and tear him up! <<Noise Cut>>!"

A whooshing sound followed the boy's scream. It was the sound of something cutting through the air.

Masaki caught a glimpse of a glowing white afterimage as he ducked into another hallway.

It was circular and about one meter wide.

All of the windows, walls, and doors in the surroundings broke and crumbled down.

Masaki peeked around the corner and saw that the corridor had been transformed; the concrete walls and metal doors lay scattered on the floor in ruins.

It was a paranormal phenomenon.

"Wh-what is that!?"

Masaki jumped out of hiding.

It was dangerous to stay where he was.

Now that he's shortened the distance between us, I'm close enough to confront him, but does he have a knife? Masaki thought as he found a new hiding place. There's no way that he could swing an invisible knife and cut everything in the area! I can't believe the doors and walls were completely destroyed.

It's not something a normal human could do.

Masaki guessed that it had something to do with that thing called Dialect, even though he didn't know anything about it.

That guy was completely insane and his actions were anything but normal.

"You... why haven't you run off yet, huh?"

That guy is dangerous! I might be killed if I'm careless.

Masaki didn't understand why, but the moment the boy shouted, the invisible knife attacked.

It was sharp enough to cut even iron and concrete.

Despite it being clear that the thin, wiry boy was the perpetrator, he was screaming like he was a victim.

"Gaaaaah!! I can still use it! It's useful! This much... this much... is strong! It's strong! Gaaah!!"

"Give me a break!"

Masaki started running away. The wiry young man chased after him.

Masaki saw a dead end further down the corridor.

He was cornered.

Masaki's hand landed on a classroom door.

He placed both of his hands on the handle and forced it downward.

It opened!

Luckily, the door wasn't locked.

He rushed inside.

The room was just like any other classroom. Desks and chairs were lined up in rows, and there was a large monitor instead of a blackboard at the front. It was a typical classroom with modern equipment.

The view from the window reminded him that he was on the 28th floor.

There was no escape.

"Ha...ha...ha..."

"Haa, haa, haa... haa."

The wiry boy appeared in the doorway of the classroom. His breathing much heavier than Masaki's.

Masaki tried to use conversation to stall the boy.

"Wh-why are you doing this!?"

"Heeh... because you heard what we were saying!"

"Even though I heard you, I didn't understand what you were saying... honestly."

"You know! If I don't kill you... I-I'll be in trouble! I'll show you. I can still cut! I can still use it!"

"....Ugh... is there nothing I can do?"

Masaki couldn't understand what he was saying.

Instead, he tried analyzing his speech and behavior. The boy's actions seemed to have been provoked by someone else. Maybe that person was in the other classroom.

Even though the young man had lost all sense of reason, his judgment seemed to be fine. He slowly came closer to drive him into a corner.

"Cut...cut...cut...I'll cut...this guy too...one person...two people...anyone..."

"Uuu..."

Masaki also had Dialect, but it wasn't something that could be used in a fight.

What should I do?

The other guy reduced the distance between them so that Masaki was in the range of that mysterious power. The moment he shouted, Masaki would be cut along with the walls, windows, desks and chairs.

He didn't hear any footsteps from the corridor, so it seemed like no one was coming to help him.

Would he be killed?

He started trembling.

Will I be killed?

The ceiling collapsed.

Chapter 1-5

There was a thunderous roar as part of the ceiling that served as a light panel fell from above.

The wiry young man that was chasing him jumped back out of the classroom when he saw it. His agility matched his thin frame.

Masaki couldn't move, but since he was by the window, he wasn't caught up in the wreckage.

Was he lucky?

Or was he unlucky?

After that, he started to see strange beings falling from the floor above.

Card soldiers, hatted mice, ducks, parrots, crabs, and a gigantic cat.

A girl clung to the tufty triangular ears of the cat.

The girl spoke, her voice clear as water.

"...Who are you?"

Masaki was fascinated by her appearance - her beautiful golden hair and sapphire eyes.

"Er, I'm Kusunoki Masaki... I transferred to this school today."

"I see. Did I surprise you?"

"I was really surprised. I thought I was going crazy for a moment - wait, who the hell are you?"

"...I feel sorry for you."

She didn't answer my question; instead, she spoke words of pity.

"Me? Why?"

"You're going to die."

"What!?"

Masaki heard the faint sound of something slicing through the air and turned around.

Outside the window—

Masaki saw a creature with the upper body of a hawk and the lower body of a lion, with a wingspan larger than the classroom!

It was a legendary monster that appeared in fairytales and fantasies - an ominous fantasy creature that was half-bird and half-beast. A griffon.

A huge black shadow plunged in.

"Uwaaaaah!"

Masaki dove to the floor. However, the scream did not come from his mouth.

The window broke with a crash.

The wall crumbled.

The building shook.

Shards of glass fell, scattering over his back.

The small fragments that rained onto him didn't hurt, but the big fragments were quite painful.

The rain of glass and the shaking of the building stopped.

When he raised his face, he saw that the head of the gigantic hawk completely filled up the space between the ceiling and the floor. The spread out wings of the upper body and the lion lower body was outside the window. It was bigger than the big cat.

It was really a griffon.

Such a creature couldn't exist in reality.

It must be imaginary.

The card soldiers and hatted mice must also be the same.

The griffon moaned in a throaty, hoarse voice.

**"Alas, I have been stuck within this room! How embarrassing that I did not fit!
But if I take in a long and deep breath, I shall surely blow this building down
flat!"¹**

The huge fantasy creature took a deep breathe.

The girl sitting on top of the large cat was the one that controlled it.

"Wait here."

"You wish for me to wait and do nothing?"

¹ Mr. Griffin is speaking in iambic pentameter ^^

The girl waved her hand to send him away.

"Since I don't have a partner anymore, you may return."

"Grrrrrrrr!"

The griffon roared and glared at the girl with its ferocious eyes.

The girl glared back at him.

The girl had given an order to the fantasy creature, but it was being unexpectedly defiant.

Was everything alright?

Masaki watched attentively with bated breath.

"Hmph!" The griffon snorted.

That was enough to send a lot of the card soldiers flying.

"Will this, the coming battle be resolved? Will I not get a turn to fight this time?"

"Yes."

"Then yours truly shall wait until next time!"

The huge hawk head left the classroom in the same showy manner that it used when it entered.

The girl frowned.

"...That was a pain."

She didn't like the griffon's plan to "wait until next time".

"Was it a big deal?"

Masaki got up while brushing the fallen splinters of glass off of himself.

The huge gaping hole in the wall was proof that what he just saw wasn't a dream or illusion.

But maybe this moment was the continuation of the dream...

"...I'm glad that he survived," the girl muttered.

The girl's tone lacked emotion, but he completely agreed with what she said.

"Really... I'd appreciate it if you would tell me if my life is no longer in danger, but...who are you?"

"You... you don't know who I am?"

"It's because I only just transferred schools."

"Really now... isn't all of this terrifying? This cat, the card soldiers, the griffon from just now, and my Dialect."

"I was shocked and frightened when the griffon came through the wall. But no matter how strong it is, a power is a power. Its user can be scary, but I think you're someone I can rely on, since you just saved me."

The girl looked liked she was lost in thought, though her face was still expressionless.

"...When I destroyed the ceiling, I didn't know you were here... I only saved you by chance."

"Ah, okay, was that it? Even so, you ordered the griffon to leave when it came, didn't you?"

"Yes, that's right."

For Masaki, even that was enough for him to thank her. Only a little earlier his situation had been hopeless.

The girl tilted her head to the side.

"...With only that, you trust me?"

"That's enough for me."

"Is there some sort of discount sale on trust going on~? "

"No, no, no! I'll have you know that I properly thought about it before making my decision!"

"A sale for a shop that's going bankrupt..."

"I'm a bankrupt shop!? I'm not selling trust cheap, so I'll be able to do business for a long time!"

"Whatever you say..."

"Is there some reason why you don't want to be relied upon?"

"No," the small girl replied.

Then she finally answered his original question.

"...We are the Breaker Team 'Help Cat'."

Though her voice was cold, it was a surprisingly cute team name.

He remembered hearing about Breaker from Shirley.

"We do rounds to make sure that there aren't any rule-breakers and we warn people who break the rules of the academy. Those kinds of things"

"Could it be that that guy who was chasing me is a rule-breaker?"

"Yes... he will be caught soon."

"Eh? Even if he runs away?"

"I have a fast partner... he'll be cornered. He's troublesome, but he should be a Level 4."

She muttered the last words to herself, then she cast her eyes to the window.

Masaki followed her gaze and shifted his attention outside.

There was a sudden flash of light.

He was blinded.

From another school building came a flash of light. It shot between the groups of buildings in the city and flew out towards the horizon.

It was as if a bolt of lightning left the building. Or maybe it was a laser gun - it seemed like a kind of weapon.

At almost the same time, there was an earthquake.

"Uwawawa!"

Masaki was left trembling, but it seemed like the girl expected it to happen.

"....."

It didn't take long for the flash of light and the earthquake to finish.

The girl lifted her blonde hair and brought her left hand close to her ear. She wore a silver bracelet on her wrist. It was adorned with an engraved rose that bore a purple crystal.

"—Is it over? Really... you're pretty smart. Let's meet up."

Masaki was perplexed.

The wiry young man that had put him in this situation seemed to have been caught by someone else in some other place.

He noticed that the card soldiers and hatted mice had disappeared.

All that was left was the rubble and the holes in the wall and ceiling. The classroom was like a condemned building.

The girl stood alone in the wreckage.

She started walking towards the ruined door.

"W- wait!"

"...Do you want to make a claim?"

"That's not what I want... I didn't want to know your organization or the name of your team. What is your name?"

She answered after a bit of consideration.

"...I'm Alice Clockheart. Goodbye."

The girl disappeared into the corridor.

Masaki began to rise from the floor. However, the fatigue from running away with all his might and the repeated shocks finally caught up with him, so he couldn't muster any energy.

"So *this* is the floating academy city, 'Canaan'."

Masaki, who had just arrived in this town of people who had awakened to certain abilities gathered, was met with trouble on his first day of school.

Chapter 1 Intermission

Wind whistled through the classroom where Masaki stood, rooted in place by shock.

He listened to the sound of footsteps down the corridor.

People wearing protectors similar to bulletproof vests over their uniforms and dark green helmets were swarming into the many classrooms.

Leading them was a girl with short, evenly cut hair who had had a brave demeanor. At first Masaki thought she was a man due to her stern manner, but then he noticed that she was wearing a skirt.

She came across Masaki, then stared in wonder.

"Uh, who are you?"

"Ah... I'm a transfer student."

"So that means you can't give me your Ring Gear..."

"What?"

"You'll hear about it from a teacher later. Right now you need to be treated for that injury you got earlier."

"I think I'm alright..."

"That isn't possible! I saw you bleeding!"

"Oh..."

Chapter 1 Intermission

He had thought that it was only a little scratch, but blood was oozing from his knee. His trousers were being dyed dark red.

When he noticed it, he started to feel a throbbing pain.

"Sit there. You'll be taken care of immediately. Are there any other places where you're hurt? Did you hit your head?"

She crouched on the floor beside him while talking to him and drew closer to him.

She was a girl with a strong-willed look.

Masaki checked himself.

"Let's see... I think I hit my shoulder afterwards? My head seems fine."

"Alright, your shoulder. Your name and class?"

"Kusunoki Masaki. I'm in the second year, but I haven't been told which class I'm in yet. I was heading to the staff room."

"It was really unlucky for you to meet Hell Cat on your first day."

"Hell...?"

"The one who trashed this classroom."

"Ah, she saved me."

"It was luck! She made the ceiling collapse - that's no joke! The wall was also destroyed! How many classrooms must she render unusable by carelessly wrecking the school... It's unforgiveable!"

Chapter 1 Intermission

The girl bit her lip. She was obviously getting worked up.

"You, uh, *like* this school, right?"

"Huh? Yeah, of course. I hate the people who break the rules, so in order to protect this school I joined Breaker."

"Ah, so you're part of Breaker."

"That's right. But I'm a Supporter. The Supporters are the people who aren't suited for capturing duty and whose levels aren't very high; they do cleanup work, go on patrols, and act as backup for the vanguard members."

"I see. Supporter work is important."

"Exactly!" She nodded, delighted.

Masaki looked around the room. He saw people taking pictures of the surroundings and cleaning up the rubble.

There were around 20 people.

"You see, my level isn't very high, but I'm good at emergency first aid, so there's no need to worry!"

"Okay."

Masaki, who still hadn't gotten used to Dialect, felt that he could rely on the girl due to her diligent speech and conduct rather than her level.

"That reminds me, I never told you my name, did I? I'm Koori of the second year class ZE."

Chapter 1 Intermission

"Koori-san, is it?"

"Yeah. Now, since I'm going to treat you... take off your clothes so I can see your wound."

"Eh!?"

"What's wrong?"

"You want me to take off my clothes *here*? But you're a girl, and..."

"Don't be stupid. How is being modest going to help me treat your injury?"

"Fine."

He needed the first aid, so he started to undo his belt.

Koori blushed deeply. "That wasn't what I meant! It's your knee that's hurt, so rolling up your pants is fine! I told you to take off your clothes because of your shoulder, so take off... Take off your shirt! Honestly!"

"Is that what you meant? Sorry about that."

"Yeah. Er, my explanation wasn't good enough, was it?"

Both of them blushed.

Masaki started to take off his shirt.

Chapter 2-1

Masaki's wound was treated by Koori, one of the Breaker Supporters.

Even though she only sterilized it and applied medical tape, he could no longer feel any pain, and in a few days there wouldn't even be a scar.

I'm so lucky, he thought.

Masaki was extremely late by the time he arrived at the staff room on the 30th floor.

Had the first lesson already begun?

"Pardon me." He knocked politely, then opened the door.

He had imagined that it would be a large room with the teacher's desks all lined up, but it was completely different from his expectations.

There was a small reception area and a computer monitor on the wall. The computer asked for Masaki's name, so he gave it.

After a short wait, a teacher came out from the inner part of the room. It was a gentle-looking man with gray hair. He wore a white doctor's jacket over his indigo suit and round glasses. When he spoke, his voice was gentle.

"Hmm, you must be Kusunoki Masaki-kun, right?"

"Yes."

"I am your homeroom teacher, Hariya Gen."

"It's a pleasure to meet you."

"The pleasure is all mine. I heard the report - it seems you had quite the run-in this morning."

"I guess I got lucky." Masaki responded humbly.

Hariya-sensei smiled bitterly.

"No, I wouldn't say that. Meeting Hell Cat on your first day... that's completely unlucky."

"Do you mean Help Cat?" Masaki thought he'd misheard the teacher.

The teacher's smile wavered.

"Ah...those girls can boast of having the best results amongst all the members of Breaker, but they have also done the most damage. They shouldn't be called Help Cat; their nickname, Hell Cat, suits them much better."

"I see. So, instead of 'Help Cat,' it's 'Hell Cat'?"

"Haha...Hell Cat is slang for that 'Devilish Woman'... er, it's rude of me to speak ill of my pupils on your first day here. Please forget about it."

A lot has been said about them. It might be that they cause trouble wherever they go. Koori, the Supporter, also got angry when talking about them, thought Masaki.

Sure, there had been a murderous youth after Masaki, but destroying the classroom ceiling and making a big hole in the wall might have been going just a bit too far. However, thanks to that girl, Masaki was safe, so he couldn't figure out what to make of her.

"Breaker is collaborating with the police and bears the burden of maintaining public order in this school, but some of their members tend to go overboard."

"Right." Masaki nodded vaguely.

"Did you have any trouble finding your way to Alrescha?"

"I have a friend who lives in Canaan, so I got her to show me around."

"Ahaha, that's good."

Masaki thought about Shirley. Was the emergency she talked about resolved safely?

"Kusunoki-kun, it's really good that you have a friend here. If people support each other, they can rise to greater heights - though in your case that might not be necessary."

"Huh?"

Hariya-sensei looked down at his wrist. A holographic screen popped up and displayed the time - 8:35 AM.

"It looks like you'll enter your class while it's in session. Well, let's talk as we walk."

"Ah, sure."

"I'm not sure if I said this already, but your class is Year 2, Class A."

"Eh? I'm in Class A?"

"Here, the classes are divided by levels. With your level, the class is obvious."

"Are there a lot of people in Class A, by any chance?"

"No. Why do you ask? In the second year there are 30 classes, going all the way to ZE. I thought it was explained before you transferred... as it stands, you have the highest level in the school - you're a Level 7 Globalizer."

Masaki was flabbergasted.

This was the first time that he had heard anything like that.

No - when the staff members in black suits visited, they might have given an explanation about the levels.

But he had been thrust into an unknown world - even if they had explained the world's systems to him, there was no way that he could understand them immediately. Maybe Masaki was slow.

"...I'm the highest level?"

"Yes."

"That must be a joke, right? I mean, what I have is, that is... there must be some kind of mistake. What I saw a little while ago was amazing..."

The young man had cut the iron door with ease, and the girl had called the griffon.

And there was also the light that came from that school building - that must have been somebody's Dialect. It was a supernatural phenomenon that made him tremble.

Masaki's power wasn't anything like that.

Hariya-sensei looked serious. "Since you still don't know a lot about it, it might seem that way..."

"Is that right?"

"Did you see the results after the examination? Even if it was wrong, it wasn't a joke. You are one of only six people in this school that are Level 7."

Masaki was at a loss for words.

Hariya-sensei started to say something, but at that moment...

"...What you just said now... is it true?"

He had heard that voice before.

He couldn't forget that clear, beautiful voice.

It came from further down the corridor.

Without realizing it, Masaki quickened his pace and peered into the stairwell on the left hand side of the corridor.

A person's shadow cascaded down the stairs.

In the middle of the scene, a girl stood with her back to the window, the light flowing in illuminating her from behind.

It was her - Alice Clockheart was there.

Eyes like a lake, hair like melting gold and a frilly blue dress.

The small girl once again looked down on him.

Masaki gulped.

"You like to perch in high places, don't you?"

"Have we met?"

"What, you don't remember?"

Alice gave a small nod, her face expressionless.

Masaki's shoulders drooped. What to him was an unforgettable experience was nothing to her.

"Well, I guess I don't have any distinctive features... I was in the classroom when the ceiling collapsed. You told off the griffon."

"Ah... are you the person that wasn't in the report from headquarters?"

Hariya-sensei cut in. "Er, that's my fault. I wasn't able to monitor his position."

Monitor? Masaki was puzzled.

Hariya-sensei took out a silver bracelet. It looked similar to the ones Alice and Shirley were wearing. However, it didn't have a rose relief - it was rustic and plain.

"It's a Ring Gear; all of the students and staff members on Canaan wear one. Outside of the city, it's like a cell phone. When there's an emergency, it notifies Breaker and the teachers about where it is. It can keep track of your health from your heart rate and brain waves."

"I see. So if I had this, I wouldn't have been pinned under the ceiling."

"Hahaha... that's right." Hariya-sensei's laugh seemed forced.

Alice tilted her head to the side. "...Does it have something to do with the time and place?"

"No, no, no, if she knew someone was there she wouldn't have made the ceiling collapse!"

"..."

The silence became uncomfortable.

Alice went back to her previous question.

"...Are you really Level 7?"

"That's what he just told me, but I don't think that my power is really that strong."

"...The strength of a person's power... has nothing to do with what the person thinks or wishes."

Alice turned her eyes, as if asking for a second opinion.

Hariya-sensei nodded in agreement.

"I'm not the kind of teacher that would joke about a student's results. Kusunoki-kun is definitely a Level 7. However, his ability is different from the ones that Clockheart-kun and the others have, so while the evaluation might be high, in terms of practicali-"

"I've decided."

"Huh?" Masaki raised his voiced.

Alice didn't bother to hear the full explanation and had just cut off Hariya-sensei.

"Hold on a minute! Kusunoki-kun only just started school."

"...If he's a Level 7, classes and such won't be any help. Can a flightless human teach a bird how to fly?"

"It might be true that he won't be able to get a lot out of it, but it doesn't mean that the classes teach only how to use the ability. There's a lot of other important material to learn."

"You don't need to disturb *that* class in the middle of a lesson, right? It can wait until the break."

"Hrm..."

"Or is there something that you want to teach the 666 fairies living in my Dialect? That would be wonderful."

"No, haha... I couldn't do that."

"That's unfortunate."

Alice's cynical words caused Hariya-sensei to sink into silence.

She looked down on them from the stairs. Her gaze drifted toward Masaki. "...You just changed schools, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"I shall show you around the school."

"Really? But, I'm about to go to class now..."

Hariya-sensei waved his hand. His expression made it seem more like he was waving a white flag. "It's not really a problem, Kusunoki-kun. Like Clockheart-kun said, if you go now, you'll disrupt the current lesson. I'll leave it to her to show you around and introduce you to the class."

"Is that really alright?"

"Well, how should I put it... Clockheart-kun's Wonder Carnival is beyond normal evaluation. Do you catch my drift?"

"No...?" Masaki didn't understand what the teacher was getting at.

The teacher lowered his voice. It was as if he was talking about a witch.

"...I'll say it in a way that anyone can understand... You shouldn't upset her or she'll throw a tantrum."

"Huh!?"

"For the sake of the school's peace, don't offend her."

"Is it okay for the school to let her do what she wants?"

It was just like a child ringleader and their followers. In society, you should be protected by lots of rules and laws.

"It's hard to explain, Kusunoki-kun. The academy is a place where you should get used to communal living. Cooperation is really important here."

"We're supposed to be on good terms with everyone?"

"No. In the spirit of cooperation, everyone is the same, but you shouldn't defy the strong people."

"Why's that?"

"You're still young, but you want to live a long life, right? I certainly do."

"S-sure, my life is important, but..."

Masaki had only known Alice Clockheart for a short time, but she didn't seem to be a violent and senseless person. However, she had reduced a classroom to ruins a little while ago. If Masaki had taken a wrong step, would he have died? He could tell that his situation was frightening.

He nodded with a sigh.

"I understand."

Hariya-sensei handed him the glittering silver Ring Gear.

"Wear this. Well then, I look forward to seeing you in Class A later. I'll be praying for your safety."

"Praying..."

It was all the more ominous, like he was telling a soldier to head to the frontlines. It was the same as saying "Good luck!"

The teacher quickly retreated back to the staff room.

Masaki and Alice were alone.

"...Is it alright now?"

She slowly descended from the top of the stairs.

She really is short, thought Masaki. The top of her head only reached Masaki's chest. Despite this, Alice seemed to be able to look down on him from below.

"Your name?"

"I'm Kusunoki Masaki."

This was the second time that he had given her his name.

"...Come to think of it, I might have heard that before."

"Is it alright for me to call you Clockheart-san?"

"...Whatever you like. I shall now show you around the school, Kusunoki-kun."

"Thanks. I'm in your care."

Despite their rocky start, his gratitude wasn't a lie, since she was going out of her way to help him.

"...What a strange person." Alice muttered, wearing the same expression as always.

"What!?"

Did she misunderstand? wondered Masaki.

Chapter 2-2

They had to wait a little while for an elevator to arrive at the Elevator Pillar.

They rode it down.

The silence within enveloped them, creating a floating sensation as it descended.

"By the way, why were you on the stairs a little while ago?"

"...Is it strange for me to take the stairs?"

"No. My acquaintance and I climbed the stairs to the 30th floor, so I guess it's not that strange."

"Do you think your acquaintance is strange?"

"Eh? Well, maybe."

Alice averted her eyes. "...It's because I've gotten used to being alone," she muttered. It was like she was talking to herself. Since her expression never changed, it was hard to tell what she was thinking.

"Is there something troubling you?"

She looked surprised.

"...What, is there nothing that bothers you? There are people without worries, right?"

"No, that's not why I asked."

Now that he thought about it, though, Masaki wasn't worried about being alone. It was something that perplexed him, but since things had gotten so hectic lately, it felt more like he had no time to be worried.

"Well, since you're having a conversation with me, who you only just met, you're probably not worried about being alone."

Instead of answering, Masaki decided to put on the bracelet the teacher had given him. He opened the clasp, then closed it around his wrist. It was easy. A window appeared above the bracelet, displaying "Welcome to Ring Gear!"

Masaki noticed a small hole on a flat side of the bracelet.

"What is this hole used for?"

"...You'll find out eventually."

"Haha, everyone keeps saying that."

"It's something that can't be expressed in words. Telling you about it is useless if you haven't experienced it yourself."

"I guess that's true."

A soft ding rang out. The elevator had arrived at the first floor.

They stepped out of the elevator. Since class was still in session, there was no one in the vast hallway. It was somewhat eerie.

"...I'll show you around the school."

"Okay."

"This is the entrance to Alrescha."

"That's right."

"And just outside is a nice café. Now it's time for tea."

"Eh!?"

With that, they went outside.

It was still really hot.

Alice waved her left hand and a translucent white parasol appeared. The hologram provided her with a bit of shade.

"We drink tea a lot in my country."

Surely, the entrance couldn't be the only part of the academy she intended to show him. Maybe she wanted to show him around the city since it was all part of the academy. But did she have a plan in mind?

"After you, then." Masaki was interested in Academy City's cafés more than anything else. He had seen several after he left the station but he hadn't had a chance to go inside them.

They left the school building and, after walking down the road lined with apartment blocks for a few minutes, they arrived at Alice's favorite café. Masaki would have missed it without Alice, since it was hidden by the roadside trees.

It was an imitation of an English café, with dark green walls and a brown roof. A Union Jack flag was displayed beside the entrance. It was an all-around small shop.

He opened the wooden door.

The manager was polishing a teacup behind the counter. He nodded and smiled at them when they entered. Alice exchanged a look with the manager, then went over to a table deep within the shop as if it were her own house.

She stopped at the last table in the back of the shop. It was poorly lit and had no windows nearby.

Was that her favorite seat?

"...There."

She motioned him to sit in the chair, then sat down on the opposite side.

Real wooden chairs were rare, as were tables. They must have cost a fortune.

"Phew... I can finally relax."

"Really?"

He ought to have been accustomed to plastic tables and chairs, but wood was much better for drinking black tea. It had some warmth.

Alice's expression changed a little at Masaki's words.

Her eyes, which had seemed to be staring into the distance the whole time, finally focused on Masaki.

"...This is Canaan's worst fault... Since there are lots of students, almost all the shops are cheap and only use plastic teacups."

"Does it bother you that much?"

"Completely. The teacup has to be ceramic."

"Right! And it must be just the right weight. Plastic is too light and the shape is usually poor. My favorites are the cups with thin rims."

Alice nodded in agreement. This might have been the first time that she showed her feelings so clearly.

"I feel dejected when I have to drink from a bulky, toy-like cup. And when it's a shop that says it's a specialist tea shop, I'm shocked into silence."

"I hate it when they just dump the teabag into the pot. Why do they do that? It completely ruins the flavor of the tea."

"That's right, it ruins the tea."

"Right."

Masaki shrugged his shoulders and Alice touched her lip with a finger.

Perhaps that was her way of laughing.

"...It's surprising."

"What is?"

"I wouldn't expect you to be so particular about tea."

"Hahaha, I don't fit the image, do I? I like coffee shops and restaurants. I like to relax while taking in the atmosphere, and if the food is delicious, it makes me happy. I enjoy checking out various shops in my spare time."

"Is that right?"

"Yeah."

"...You really don't fit the image."

"Really? Even so, I'm also a good cook. "

"...What is your forte?"

"I make a mean crème brûlée."

"Ah... That's a very elegant dish. Are you from a high-class family?"

"No, that has nothing to do with it..."

It was difficult for him to explain his hobby. He didn't have a special story about how he got started.

"...When I was a child, I made pudding. I mixed the flour with water according to the recipe. It was too hard and it came out too sweet, but a friend ate it and said that it was delicious. After that, I started trying out other recipes and started to wonder what pudding sold in shops tasted like. What was the shop's style? Eventually I became interested in the shops' atmosphere and tableware."

"...I see."

"However, it would be a stretch to say that I live to eat."

Masaki laughed as if he had made a joke. However, Alice slowly shook her head.

"It isn't a stretch... Teatime is the color of life and is life itself."

"If we say that, is a life without color no different from death?"

"Ah... are you into poetry as well?"

"No, I'm no good with literature. I get a headache from trying to read long words. Deep meanings just fly over my head – the only things I like to read are menus full of delicious food."

Alice fell silent.

Masaki tilted his head in confusion. He didn't intend to say something offensive.

"What's wrong?"

"...Kusunoki-kun doesn't read, right?"

"Long words? That doesn't mean I don't read at all."

"But the atmosphere..."

"What a weird thing to say, Clockheart-san. You can't read things like air that you can't see."

"...What was that? You're starting to annoy me. "

The tea arrived just as Alice's mouth rose into a pout. She hadn't placed an order, so it seemed she was a regular customer.

An intricate green pattern was etched into the teacup and saucer placed before Masaki. He treated the cup delicately as he raised it to his lips. The strong aroma filled his nostrils, hinting at the tea's quality. He could feel his excitement rising as he tilted the cup for a taste.

The flavor didn't betray his expectations – it exceeded them. It touched his heart.

"Ah, this... this is amazing..."

"...Do you like it?"

"Of course! The taste is just as amazing as its container."

"It's a Wedgwood teacup. It seemed to match your tastes."

"It's been a long time since I've used something so beautiful."

"Feel free to buy it if you like it. That goes for both the tea set and the tea leaves."

"Oh, so they sell those, too?"

"I'm sure the price isn't a big deal for you, but... the set costs about 60,000 JD."

Her tone was casual despite the high price.

Masaki nearly dropped the teacup in surprise. He didn't know the market prices in Academy City, but the average salary for a daily part-time job was about 10,000 JD¹.

"Hey, that's more than my living costs!"

"You must be exaggerating... Kusunoki-kun, the tea that you're drinking now costs 4,000 JD."

"Eh!?"

Masaki stiffened.

¹ Japan Dollar

He couldn't believe his ears.

The tea was delicious, but that price couldn't be right.

He was about to cry.

Alice lowered her voice. "...Could it be... does it cost too much for you?"

He nodded, speechless.

She silently sipped from her teacup, exhaled, and, for the first time, her emotionless mask was replaced with an expression that could be easily understood: a smile of delight.

"Ehehe... the best tea fetches the highest price."

Chapter 2-3

In the end, Alice paid for him. She had intended to pay for his portion from the start.

"...I've decided that today we will celebrate your transfer. You weren't going to do anything important today, anyway."

A cake was soon brought out, and Alice paid 10,000 JD for it. It was incredibly delicious, but something bothered Masaki.

There was another reason Masaki had taken up cooking as a hobby. Delicious meals are expensive. If he made it himself, he only had to pay for the cost of the materials.

Put plainly, Masaki was poor.

Afterwards, Alice said that she would show him various other places in the city, so he followed her. It was hard to decline since they'd already started.

Lunch break passed quickly. The sun had moved far to the west when Masaki was reminded that they were in the sky.

He was still aware that the floating city was in the sky, of course, but one of the amusement parks in the city featured an attraction where you could take a tour around the sky by boarding a floating gondola-style vehicle. A nearby sign identified it as the "Orbital Ferris Wheel".

"Wow! Is... Is it free-floating!?"

"...Canaan is free-floating, too."

"I guess it makes sense, then."



The entire surface of the gondola was glass, so it seemed as if the bench was floating in the air. There were similar attractions that used optical illusions, but they couldn't compare to rush of really flying.

The gondola didn't sway at all when Masaki and Alice moved to look at the floating city through the glass window.

"...This is Canaan."

"Wow!"

When Masaki had seen it from the air train, the city had been obscured by clouds, which made it seem like an island floating in a sea of clouds.

However, since the gondola was floating at the same level as the city, the view made it clear that Canaan really was a floating city. The floating academy city was dyed a shade of orange by the setting sun.

The city's foundation was shaped like a funnel. The accumulation of quadrilateral shapes, similar to large toy blocks, formed the surface. Huge buildings pierced the sky from the city's surface. Many holograms displaying advertisements and other information were spread throughout the city.

Masaki could see thin circles, seemingly drawn in white thread, marking a transparent glass tube through which trains connected the city above to the land below.

A number of spheres emitting faint light flew around the floating city like satellites. They were covered with devices for weather, observation, defense, and other uses.

Alice pointed.

"...Since the whole of Canaan is large, it might look small from here, but the circumference of the foundation block is more than 1000 meters."

"It's that big!?"

"...As for those things, they all function to maintain Canaan's environment. When one breaks down, it is taken to an underground facility to be repaired in a workshop. They also have substitutes for them in the city."

"Oh, I see!"

"...This is general knowledge that's taught at the academy."

"Huh?"

"...There's a high-power bomb in the middle of the environmental maintenance equipment. The bomb is set to vaporize Canaan if the users of Dialect start to rebel."

"Wh-what the hell!? Is that true!?"

"...Maybe it is, maybe it isn't. No one has actually checked whether the bomb exists or not."

Masaki wasn't optimistic enough to believe that it was a made-up story.

A chill ran down his spine.

Alice continued in her monotonous voice. "...You might be able to check it out – you're a Level 7, after all. Your power can't be measured, and it's beyond the control of the supervisors... That's why you're free."

"No. I'm not like that."

"That's right. You don't seem like the type who'd stir up trouble... However, here in Canaan it's possible for anyone who's a Level 7 to live a luxurious life."

"Is it possible for me to have tea in that excellent cafe every day?"

"Yes."

Masaki became depressed.

"That sort of life doesn't fit me. I didn't really feel any higher in society when I was told that I have a great power. I plan to get a part-time job that has nothing to do with my power."

"...Aren't your living costs paid by Canaan?"

"It's not that. I'm not given much money for eating at restaurants or cafes."

"I see."

"My room's not that great, either. When I toured the room I was given in a hologram, I noticed that the kitchen was small. There's only one small electric gas burner. I won't be able to cook with that."

"Would you like to move?"

"What I want isn't really a luxurious kitchen; two gas burners, a place to use a chopping board, and a microwave oven would be enough for me. I'm fine with old models, too."

Isn't a fridge necessary as well? I want to cultivate herbs on the balcony, too.

However, since the rent was about the same amount as in the heart of Tokyo, he couldn't have that much.

Even a one-room cost 100,000 JD a month.

He didn't know if he'd be able to keep up with the classes since he was transferring in the second year of high school. Having a part-time job with long hours would make it more difficult.

Masaki grumbled as his thoughts raced on.

In response, Alice reached toward him without looking. She pinched the right sleeve of his uniform between her fingers.

"...You're a strange person."

"Oh, sorry. It happens when I think about cooking."

"...I thought a male Level 7 would be more violent, arrogant, and egotistical – a thoughtless person who would even mistake themselves for being the ruler of the world."

"My level doesn't feel right. Even if it did, though, I don't think I would act like that. Anyway, aren't levels like test results here?"

"...What sort of fool... Who told you such a thing?"

"Am I wrong?"

"In Canaan, levels are everything... One's Dialect is equivalent to their entire worth."

That was the exact opposite of what Shirley had said.

Power determines a person's value. It was actually a possibility here.

"W-wait. Is it wrong for a Level 7 to think that they're the ruler of the world or something?"

"Yes. I hate that kind of person."

"And yet it's not strange for Dialect to be the measure of a person's worth?"

"I haven't contradicted myself."

"What do you mean?"

Alice tugged on Masaki's sleeve, her eyes glaring at him coldly, and declared, "The king of this world is me. Those ignorant fools who've seen nary a glimpse of the top label anyone with a strong power as Level 7. While they might be strong, their misguided decision to think themselves my equals is a constant annoyance."

Maybe she's not as nice as I thought, Masaki thought. He had a feeling that he finally understood what Shirley meant. All the talk about high and low levels was ridiculous.

He heaved a sigh.

"I can't let you carry on like this. You're very smart, but your way of thinking is really twisted."

"...What?"

She separated her left hand from Masaki's sleeve. It seemed like it had disappeared right before his eyes. He didn't know whether or not she could make things disappear with her powers.

"I want you to listen."

Masaki grasped her left hand with his right. His grip was firm, but he made sure it wasn't enough to hurt her.

"Huh!?"

Alice tried to shake him off. Failing this, she glared angrily at him.

"...Do you have a death wish?"

"I was prepared for a threat the moment I decided to say this. I want you to listen to me. You may have a twisted way of thinking, but I'm sure you'll still listen to reason."

"...Then start talking."

She made many attempts to free her hand from Masaki's grasp with her free hand, but Masaki didn't give her the opportunity to do so.

"I know how amazing your ability is – you saved my life with it, and for that I'm grateful. However, you shouldn't think of yourself as a king. I'm not saying this as a Level 7 – in fact, I'm sure there was some kind of mistake in the evaluation."

"...I don't understand what you're trying to say. I'm respected because I'm at the top. You'll feel that way, too, since you're also at the top."

"Ah, but there's no top and bottom."

"You only say that because you don't fully understand the value of levels in Canaan."

"I won't discriminate by levels – not even if I end up understanding more after this. I don't want to become all alone like you."

"...!?"

Alice looked dismayed. She tried to hide it by turning to look through the window.

"...Wh-what did you just say? I have a lot of friends."

"Can a person who follows you out of fear be called a friend?"

"Ugh..."

Masaki felt like he was finally able to see her heart.

She started grinding her teeth in anger. Though it was a normal reaction for someone her age, it seemed childish for her.

Tears were welling up in the corners of her eyes when she turned to glare at him.

"...You're bold... to say such a thing to me."

"Do you plan to use your Dialect? You will end up losing two important things."

"Hmph... Do you think that we'll share the same fate if the gondola is broken?
How foolish. Amongst my 666 fairies, 98 of them have the ability to fly."

Indeed, if she used her ability to destroy the gondola, Masaki would fall from the height of 1000 meters, while Alice would be able to ride back on one of her fairies. It was a terrifying conversation, but he was prepared for it.

Masaki shook his head. "That's not it. The thing you'll have lost... it's the chance to call me a friend."

"...Huh?" Her mouth dropped open, just as Masaki expected.

"A friend. Are you wondering what kind of power I have that lets me speak so boldly to the king of the world? We're friendly enough to have shared a cup of tea. That memory won't fade away. At the very least, I think we can be friends, but I don't know how you feel about it."

Alice's expression became cold, and her voice was like ice. "...Kusunoki Masaki, you insolent fool... I don't give out free meals."

"That's what you focused on!? W-well, I'll pay you back eventually..."

"...And? So I'd lose some insolent guy who's my self-declared friend. What else?"

Though it was true, it still hurt Masaki to be called a "self-declared friend" so easily. However, he was confident in himself. He gathered himself and strengthened his composure.

"Fufufu... My crème brûlée. Unfortunately, you will never be able to taste it."

"..."

Her gaze became suspicious – it was obvious she wasn't expecting that response.

"Well, it's really delicious. Really, really delicious."

"...You're going to beg for your life with pudding?"

"Eh? When did I start begging for my life!? Are you planning to execute me?"

"Of course." Alice shifted her gaze.

Through the window, the place where they boarded the "Orbital Ferris Wheel" could be seen. A short distance away from there, the amusement park ended.

They saw two people standing at the approaching gate. Alice seemed to be deep in thought while Masaki continued to wait for a response.

Finally, she spoke up. "...If Masaki... thinks of me as his friend..."

He was surprised that she had switched to using his first name.

The two stood close together in the gondola. Ever since he met her, Masaki had been fascinated by her beauty, and, being this close, he had begun to stare. Alice's cold expression faded into a blush, which she tried to hide by turning away.

But despite her power, he managed to keep holding her hand.

"I-if I think...?"

She sighed, giving it more thought.

"...It's nothing. Don't look at me like that. It's unpleasant."

"Huh? I'm not giving you a weird look."

"...How long do you plan to hold my hand?"

"Ah, sorry."

Masaki let go of her hand, flustered. It was not without reluctance that he broke the contact he had become used to so quickly.

Alice stared at her freed hand.

Her face masked her thoughts as usual.

"Without exception, I warn off all ignorant fools that confess to me by threatening to use 'Wonder Carnival' against them."

"You could at least reject them normally."

"...So, what should we do about this fool who held my hand?" She muttered so quietly that it was difficult for him to make out her words.

"Huh? What did you say?"

"...I'm talking about you... you're a strange person. Masaki-kun, you're the third person who called themselves my friend."

"Huh, really?"

"Surprising, isn't it?"

"Yeah. I thought I was the first person."

"...The second person said the same thing. It's rude. They completely deserve to die."

"Hahaha."

Masaki could finally see a change of heart in the girl who lacked expressiveness. Maybe it was because she finally felt she could relax.

"...Masaki-kun, you're looking for a part-time job, right?"

The sudden topic change was jarring. Maybe it had something to do with her.

Masaki nodded.

"Most importantly, it shouldn't clash with my classes. If it fits that criteria, I'm fine with it."

"...Talking about the common things in the world isn't one of my hobbies, but... I know about a very good job... it won't hinder your classes, your grades will improve, and you'll get special rewards."

This was an opportunity that was too good to be true. It was almost exactly what he was looking for.

"Are there any necessary qualifications for it?"

"My referral is enough."

"I see."

"...There is only one vacancy."

"!?"

Masaki felt his enthusiasm drain away.

He knew that a reward that great would require hard work, but that wasn't what bothered Masaki.

Once again, Alice's words weighed heavily upon him.

"...If you don't like it, you can resign whenever you like."

"If I was accepted, I wouldn't abandon it immediately... Does it involve doing something illegal?"

"It's completely legal. In fact, it's a job that a lot of people are grateful for."

"That's good, then. You're certain you want to refer me?"

Alice nodded.

"...Your left hand."

Masaki extended his left hand to meet Alice's own outstretched left hand.

He touched her hand gently. It was soft and felt pleasantly cool to the touch.

She didn't pull away.

It looked like she wasn't sure whether she should go through with it. Her eyes stared into the distance.

"Hm..."

"Is there a problem?"

"There isn't a problem. That's not possible. I'm fine. Definitely."

"Are you sure?"

"...This is... the contract for the sake of the job. It's merely a rule. Please repeat after me."

"Alright."

Alice smoothly recited in English, *"At this moment, a contract will be made. I accept this contract with you. We will share the results..."*

She was speaking in her native language. Masaki repeated the words, although his English was shoddy.

A gust of wind blew through the gondola.

Alice's golden hair started to rise gently. Her skirt, too, was lifted by the breeze. Masaki stood close enough to her that the edges of her skirt touched his legs.

A dazzling light spread from between the two joined hands.

Is it an optical illusion?

It was such a mysterious radiance that it didn't seem likely.

A circle light flickered into existence around the pair, then expanded. Foreign words were drawn between the outer and inner lines of the ring.

It spread out to encircle the gondola as well.

The Ring Gear should have been a purely scientific product, but it seemed to have produced a magic circle.

"We share responsibility. We swear to help each other, each believing that..."

Masaki copied Alice's words.

The brightness of the magic circle increased, almost becoming painfully bright.

"We are 'Help Cat...'"

A high-pitched sound, not unlike a bell's chime, pierced the inner parts of Masaki's ears.

The light and the sound quickly faded.

Alice lowered her eyes to the Ring Gear on her left arm.

"...It's blue."

The crystal on her bracelet had become a clear blue.

"Wasn't it purple this morning?"

"Yes... You have a good memory. It changed because we formed a contract."

"Contract?"

Masaki checked his own Ring Gear.

An identical blue crystal was stuck into the dent of the otherwise unadorned silver bangle.

"How did this get here?"

"...It's proof of the contract between Breaker partners."

"Huh!? Is this the job you were talking about before?"

"...You can leave class if there's an emergency and receive supplementary lessons afterward if you want. You'll get positive feedback in your report and just by being involved, you'll be rewarded well. There are others that patrol to make sure that nobody abuses Dialect to break the rules. If someone does, then it's our job to capture them, so a lot of people are thankful for it. This is exactly what you asked for."

"Wait a minute, Clockheart-san. Didn't I say that my Dialect doesn't have practical applications?"



Alice gave a wicked smile.

"...It doesn't matter if you use it or not. Since it's necessary to capture the rule-breakers, you can use whatever method you like."

"Ugh."

Her smile disappeared as quickly as it had appeared, making Masaki doubt it was ever there.

"...If you don't like it, you can back out... All you need to say is '*Partner cancellation*.'"

She said it like it was a trivial matter, but if Masaki rejected it now, it seemed like her feelings would be hurt.

So Masaki gave it some thought.

"I don't what kind of plan you have by asking me, but... it's like you said. Breaker's work is really close to what I wanted. My Dialect is useless for this, but I'll give it a go."

"Is that... is that so? Since you're my partner, I'll tell you about the job, but that can wait until tomorrow."

"Huh? Why not today?"

"...I'm tired, so I'll go home. I want to have a shower as well..."

Her tension had disappeared.

It was a relief.

He felt like that wasn't all.

Was she really tired?

Maybe she was feeling down?

It was hard to tell through her expressionless mask.

The speaker on the ceiling gave a washed-out announcement, letting the riders know they had almost arrived. The “Orbital Ferris Wheel” boarding platform was shaped like a tube.

It slowly came to a stop. The door opened immediately.

The cheerful female guide asked Masaki and Alice to disembark from the gondola. They moved quickly to let the next people in line get on.

Alice headed toward the exit of the amusement park. She turned her back to Masaki.

"...So I guess this is goodbye."

"Eh?"

He wondered if she meant that she was going to return soon, but it didn't seem like that.

She then continued in a quiet voice. "...That's what my second friend said. From there, she left... then I made a contract with another partner a while ago."

"Another partner? Is that me?"

"Correct."

He had a feeling that he had gotten himself involved in something serious.

Had the connection between Alice and her friend been cut off when Masaki made a contract with her?

That was inexcusable.

"How did you get separated?"

"...It wasn't my fault."

"I didn't say that it was your fault."

He understood very well that she had a weird way of thinking, but he wasn't going to jump to conclusions without hearing about the circumstances.

"...People are saying that the entirety of the damage from the incident this morning is my fault."

"What? Isn't it partially the fault of the guy who attacked me!?"

"...Since it irritated me, I lost my temper and invoked my Dialect at the Breaker headquarters."

"Th-that is..."

"That's why we separated... it wasn't my fault."

He couldn't form an opinion unless he knew a little more about it, but she seemed to have difficulty saying even that much.

"Can you give me a bit more detail?"

"...I refuse. I don't want to remember."

It seemed she was clinging to a memory of something that had changed.

Her manners weren't good enough to be complimented.

Maybe the people that made friends with her all had that kind of personality –
Masaki could only think of one person.

But he had to be sure.

"Then, can you tell me the name of your second friend?"

"Why?"

"You don't have to tell me."

After thinking about it, Alice turned around and spoke the name.

"... Sakurazaka Shirley."

Chapter 2 Intermission

It was a small, dimly lit room. The only light came from glowing ceiling tiles. There were no windows. There were no desks or chairs, but a bed stood in the middle of the room.

On it was a young man held down by a belt. His limbs and his torso were thin and wiry. He had been put to sleep. Thick metal cuffs enclosed his wrists like handcuffs.

A column of light streamed into the room.

A man in a white doctor's coat stepped through the open door.

"Hey..."

"Haa... haa... haa..."

"Are you okay? No, you don't look it... you're lucky that you're still alive. No – perhaps you're unlucky."

The wiry young man raised his head to focus his bloodshot eyes on the man.

The visitor spoke under his breath as if he was talking to himself.

"Ah, you can rest easy. I've taken care of the surveillance cameras and the recording devices."

The visitor's mouth was slanted.

The wiry youth opened his mouth to say something, but only rough breaths came out. His voice seemed incapable of forming words.

Chapter 2 Intermission

"Haa... ua... aaa..."

"You can't talk?"

"Ua..."

When the visitor started to approach him, the wiry boy's expression turned to one of alarm. The confidence he had while chasing and shouting at Masaki had all but disappeared.

"The adjustment seems to have been a success."

"Uuhn..."

"Have you forgotten about me? Well, it's a common side effect, so it's within expectations."

He stood beside the restrained wiry youth.

"A... ugh..."

The visitor moved in so his mouth was beside the wiry youth's ear.

"But still!! You're no match for a Level 7!!" He shouted.

The wiry youth's face twisted in pain in response.

"Ugh!"

"Another failure, huh? Reality is harsh. I'm drowning in despair and it seems like my heart is about to break."

"Uuhn..."

Chapter 2 Intermission

"However, your effort wasn't for naught. My goal is greater than any of us. I promise to not give up until your noble sacrifice has saved the future of this academy. My research is entering its final stages."

The visitor retrieved a thick syringe from the pocket of his white jacket. He forced the wiry young man to take it, making a slight sound.

The needle found a blood vessel automatically and inserted itself painlessly. It then began pushing the contents of the cylinder into the boy, following its program smoothly.

A little while later, the visitor removed the syringe and left the bed.

"Good night, little lamb. Sleep well."

Chapter 3-1

Masaki returned to Alrescha alone.

Thanks to the Ring Gear's navigational functions it didn't take too long for him to return, but it was already the last class of the day.

He headed towards the classroom at a quick pace, as he was didn't want to be any later. Originally, he was supposed to have been introduced to everyone at 8:00 this morning, but many hours had already passed since then.

A long time.

At last, he finally arrived in front of his classroom.

Masaki remembered what happened that morning and sighed.

Shirley picked him up from the station early in the morning, then led him to the school building. He briefly met the boy named Ishounuma in front of the elevator, then decided to take the stairs to avoid him.

On the way, Shirley was called away for an emergency, so they separated. After that he ran into another problem. Masaki was attacked by a wiry young man with a dangerous ability.

When he was driven into a corner, Alice's Dialect saved him. He got wrapped up in an arrest drama but as a result he was saved.

Koori, a Supporter from Breaker, treated his injuries, then he met his teacher and headed towards his classroom, but instead of reaching his class, he met Alice again.

Alice led him out of the school building, despite saying she would show him around the school.

By this point, Masaki's plan for the day was completely ruined.

However, he considered himself lucky to have tasted that delicious tea.

Despite having experienced it all himself, he had a hard time believing his own story.

He had been nowhere near the classroom on his first day of class.

On top of that, he had ended up joining a school committee before he had set one foot into the classroom, although the status on his Ring Gear still read "Registration Pending."

Alice had left early and went home. Finally, after such an eventful day, Masaki had reached his classroom.

Masaki took a deep breath before the door.

He couldn't hear any voices from the other side of the door. It was surprisingly quiet.

Class was definitely in progress, so he knocked on the door and slowly opened it. The room was empty.

"Huh?"

The large monitor at the front of the classroom displayed "P.E.: Gymnasium 12-B" to the empty desks.

"Guh, this just isn't my lucky day. I only wanted to introduce myself..."

Since he hadn't brought his P.E. kit, he would have to go to the gym without a change of clothes.

The building had 60 floors, but thanks to his Ring Gear he never got lost. He soon found his way to gymnasium 12-B on the 12th floor of Alrescha.

He pushed the large iron door open.

He heard high-pitched voices and the rhythmic sound of a basketball hitting the floor.

Thud, thud, thud...

"Teyaaaaaaa!!"

Shirley, dressed in her gym clothes, jumped with the orange ball held in one hand. The two bunches of brightly-colored hair on the back of her head left behind a trail like an afterimage.

It seemed like everything around her was going in slow motion as she pushed the basketball down into the hoop.

She scored a slam dunk.

"Wow..."

Masaki's astonishment was coupled with a wave of nostalgia. He had watched her do the same thing seven years ago, but back then her hair and the basketball hoop were both shorter.

But the hoop was still high.

She played very well in one-on-one matches.

"Huh?"

Shirley ran across the court after scoring.

"Masaki~!!"

"Huh? Hold on, that's a little..."

She ran at him full-tilt, then tackled him like a linebacker.

Since Masaki had his back to the iron door, he couldn't avoid it.

Instead, he caught her. She was unexpectedly light and soft to the touch.

"Masaki!"

"H-hey..."

"Jeez, where were you!? I asked the teacher, but he only said he didn't know. Did something happen after we split up!?"

Masaki gently pushed her back before he answered. Whether she was wearing her gym clothes or her uniform, the feeling of her body against his was unsettling.

"Shirley... we're high school students now, so you should consider your actions more..."

"Ah, sorry."

"Everyone is staring..."

Masaki could hear the girls excitedly gossiping, saying things like "Who is he!?" and "Could he be her boyfriend!?"

The boys looked shocked.

It was the most awkward situation he could have gotten into, and he hadn't even introduced himself yet.

Shirley separated herself from him and stuck her tongue out.

"Nihaha, that's right! I'm also sweating."

"No, that isn't it. That wasn't what I meant."

"Huh?"

Even though she had become a high school student, she hadn't learned any tact in the seven years since he last saw her.

Shirley pointed at the court.

"Masaki, let's have a long-overdue match! I've been really looking forward to it. You must have thought about a lot of things that you want to do now that we're back together, too, right?"

"Yeah, I have, but..."

A girl walked briskly toward them. The students around the gym were wearing white shirts and shorts, but this girl was the only one wearing a red jersey. A wide headband held her hair back to show her forehead. Judging from her height and looks, she was a young child.

Is she an elementary school student? But this should be a high school. Did she skip grades? Maybe she's a high school student that looks young.

"Oi! Sakurazaka, you're in the middle of a game!"

"Ah, I'm sorry."

"And you!"

Not only did she look like an elementary school student, but she also acted like one when she turned to point at Masaki.

"Which class are you in!?"

"I transferred today—"

"Ah, so you're Kusunoki Masaki! You must have some nerve to be late to my class on your first day here!"

"Eh!? Does that mean... are you the teacher?"

"Oho? Why do you look so surprised?"

A dangerous gleam appeared in the teacher's eyes. But since Masaki was an honest person, he continued to say things that only made his situation worse.

"I was sure that you were an elementary school student."

"Alright, I get it. First, I'll let you introduce yourself to the class. After that, you'll do 100 squats—"

"Seriously?" Though it was true Masaki was extremely late, 100 squats was a harsh punishment.

There were about 30 students gathered around him. It was strange for him to introduce himself like this.

"I'm Kusunoki Masaki. I'm looking forward to being your classmate... Erm, Shir-no, Sakurazaka-san is my childhood friend."

The girls began to voice their disappointment, saying things like, "Is that all there is between them?" The teacher raised a hand to silence them.

"Al~right, class is resuming now! Next team, get onto the court! Kusunoki, why aren't you wearing your gym uniform?"

"I didn't know that we had a PE class today..."

"Nobody told you?"

"Right."

"Che, he didn't tell you about my class, huh? Is he trying to make a fool out of me? I'll strangle that Hariya guy for this! You're going to observe for today!"

"Okay."

It seemed he had escaped the 100 squats. Despite her harsh words, she seemed to be a nice teacher. He couldn't help but feel sorry for Hariya-sensei, though.

Masaki watched from the corner of the gym as he was told.

The girls who weren't playing at the moment approached him, their curiosity written on their faces.

"Hey, Kusunoki-kun."

"Hmm?"

"Are you really not in a relationship with Sakurazaka-san?"

"...Well, I was really surprised too but...she is still just like a child right?"

The girls talked to each other in whispers.

"She really is a little childish right?" "I heard that it was bad." "But even for a childhood friend, wasn't that a bit much?" "That's right, it's totally suspicious isn't it~?"

A trio of athletic guys came over to where the girls were surrounding Masaki.

"Hey, transfer student."

"Who are you guys...?"

"We came to have a little talk with you. Privately. If you can talk with the girls, then you can talk to us, right?"

The girls moved to put distance between themselves and the guys, scared away by the intimidating atmosphere. An unpleasant sensation ran through the air.

"I'd go, but... Well, since I was already late, I shouldn't leave."

"Don't worry about it, class is nearly over."

As he spoke, a bell chimed, signaling the end of class.

He could hear the teacher saying, "Right, class is finished!"

His only reason to refuse had disappeared. He wanted to talk to Shirley, but he didn't want her to get into trouble with those guys.

There was nothing else he could do, so Masaki decided to follow them.

Chapter 3-2

Even though the inside of the school building was normal, it still had 60 floors. It looked stupid getting onto an elevator.

Eventually, they brought him to a stair landing a little above the 12th floor.

Unlike the crowded area around the elevators, this place was deserted. It was the kind of place that wouldn't reach public notice.

Ishounuma was waiting in the middle of the stairs.

He looked down with a disappointed face.

"You're in Class A..."

"But I think that there has been some kind of mistake."

The four young men were surrounding him.

Ishounuma raised his left arm. There was a bangle with a snake relief. It did not have a crystal fitted into it.

A window appeared.

He started up a harmless game of rock-paper-scissors, he lost a few times and won a few times.

Did it have some kind of meaning?

Eventually a beep was emitted through the quietness.

Ishounuma smiled like an animal.

"Huhuh, the sound and video recording won't work here."

"What do you mean?"

"The Ring Gear has a feature that allows it to record the movements of pupils. It's not working now."

"Is that... by any chance, breaking the rules?"

"Be quiet. I've got better things to do than worry about than some stupid rule."

"You should worry about it but..."

"Do you want us to beat the hell out of you here, or do you want to listen to what we have to say? Make your choice."

"Both of them are unpleasant, aren't they."

The boys surrounding Masaki clenched their fists.

"Oi, transfer student. Is talking big all you can do? Listen to what I'm saying. Or I'll punch your stomach right now."

"No thank you."

"Oi you, do you understand what kind of situation you're in? The recording function is blocked as well. Are you expecting someone to save you? I said that I'll finish you off with one punch right now!"

Ishounuma raised his threatening voice.

Masaki sighed.

"If I give in once to that kind of threat, terrible things will continue to be demanded from me. Besides this isn't the first time that I've been in this situation... I can't draw back here can I."

"Really? Well then, tomorrow you won't be going to school, you'll be going to the hospital!!"

Ishounuma shouted.

The boy behind him reached forward with both his hands and Masaki pinioned him.

"Hmph... so you can't fight by yourself?"

"Ha! This guy is going to be punished. His punishment for acting too familiar with Sakurazaka-san!"

Ishounuma threw his fist forward.

No matter how he thought about it, there wasn't any reason for him to hit him one-sidedly.

Even if his upper body was pinioning someone in a hold, he still had the freedom of his legs—. Despite his legs being longer than his arms, it was half-baked.

Turning around to face Ishounuma, he threw a kick at him. The power of the kick came from the swing of his knee.

It reached the toes of the person on the other side of him.

He caved in.

"Gah!?"

Ishounuma somersaulted then collapsed.

With the heel of his returning right foot, he stamped on the toes of the boy in his hold. If it had been on the top of his foot it wouldn't have hurt very much, but the toes were one of the weaknesses of the human body.

Behind him, screams of "Gya!?" were heard.

The instant his opponent's power slackened, he let go of his upper body and released the hold.

After this, the guys on his right and left started to clench their fists. He didn't have any particular grudge against them but if they were going to do something, he couldn't hesitate.

He showered punches on the nose of the young man to his right, and low-kicked the back of the knee of the one on his left.

They moaned in pain and faltered.

They stepped back, putting distance between Masaki and themselves.

Masaki shook his wrist to clear away the lingering sensation in his right hand.

"I thought you guys had a little more experience with fights."

"Wh-wha!? Who the hell are you?"

"Although I dislike fights, I've fought together with Shirley many times. She would go against any violent guy regardless of their strength... And for some reason, people often act hostile towards me."

Thanks to that, Masaki had gotten used to dealing with situations like that naturally.

And after Shirley left, he had done a lot of training. Because he believed in her words "We'll meet again."

"I thought that it might be necessary if we were to meet each other again... and to think that I had to use it so quickly."

Ishounuma who was crouching down, stood up holding his side.

"Do-don't fuck... with me! Are you tryin' to make a fool out of me!!"

"You can still fight?"

Judging from his experience, Masaki guessed that they hadn't received any of their power from martial arts training or from experiences in brawls. He couldn't find a reason for them to be strong.

Ishounuma extended his right hand and pushed it out.

"I'll beat the shit out of you!!"

The color of the faces of the boys around him changed.

"Hey!? Isn't it risky, Ishounuma-san!?" "If ya do that, it'll leave behind evidence that even the Noise Application can't cover!" "If you use it, you'll really kill him...!!"

While frightened voices were raised around him, Masaki slowly put some distance between himself and them. Ishounuma shouted at the guys who were hesitant.

"Shut up! I didn't come here just to be made a fool of, can't you just shut up?!"

Masaki grimaced.

He knew that guys like this couldn't understand reason but...

"If I make a counterattack when I'm about to be hit, am I making a fool of you?
That's an egoistic thing to say."

"Your attitude pissed me off! I don't know what kind of Dialect you have, but you
better use it! There's no way that a guy who just awoke can beat me!"

"Hmph..."

This wasn't good.

He was in Class A.

If his power was anywhere near as powerful as Alice's, then he wouldn't be able
to finish him off.

Masaki's Dialect was useless in a fight.

With his bloodshot eyes, Ishounuma exclaimed,

"Diiiiiee!!"

A fireball around the size of a basketball materialized in the palm of his hand.

It soared.

It was getting close to Masaki's face.

"That's dangerouuss!!"

A person running up the stairs jumped out from the side, and with their right hand—struck the fireball!

They crushed the blazing-red fireball with their fist that was wrapped in white light.

At the same moment, a flash of white light gushed out from their fist. It became an arrow of dazzling light that went through the staircase.

There was a thunderous sound.

Broken pieces of concrete scattered in a flashy manner. The shockwave spread out into the corridor, causing the glass to break.

Three of Ishounuma's followers screamed and crawled away to escape.

There was a hole in the outer wall.

Smoke was faintly rising from the right hand that had crushed the fireball.

The person who had suddenly appeared smoothed down their brightly-colored hair, then glared at Ishounuma with cold eyes.

Even though the person wasn't tall, their erect figure seemed big and imposing.

They opened their lips and spoke in a sharp voice.

"What the hell were you doing!?"

"Ah-uh... Sa-Sakurazaka... san..."

Ishounuma moaned.

The person who came was Shirley.

Having avoided being hit by the fireball, Masaki wiped the cold sweat off himself.

"You saved me."

"Masaki, are you alright!?"

"Ah, thanks to you, I don't have a single scratch."

There was medical tape on his shoulder and leg from the incident in the morning, but he hadn't been hurt in this place.

"Thank goodness," Shirley said in relief.

It suppressed her anger a little.

"And? What was that supposed to be, Ishounuma? You had better give me a good explanation!"

"Well... it's... because that guy was making a fool out of us..."

"Masaki wouldn't do something like that. Well, he wouldn't say something bad about someone. So did you seriously plan on letting him die?"

She glared intently at them.

Ishounuma gave a dry laugh.

"Ha-haha... That guy is in Class A, so he wouldn't die from something like that right? Hey, that's it? Right?"

To be honest, he didn't know what would have happened if Shirley hadn't come...

"I don't really understand Dialect. It might have been like that if he says so."

Him not having any knowledge about it was a fact.

So it was possible that that fireball might have been something harmless like an illusion. But he wouldn't be able to bring himself to check if a fireball were shot at him a second time.

Shirley nodded.

"Well then, I'll let it go this time. But, if you do something like this next time, I won't show any mercy! If I hear that you used your Dialect, I'll go against you!"

"Forgive me, Sakurazaka-san... I'm a Level 6 so I can't match you."

Shirley bared her teeth.

"That's why you're no good! It isn't about whether your level is high or low! I'm talking about whether your actions are right or wrong!"

"Hii!?"

Her intensity caused Ishounuma to step back. His face went completely pale.

"Next time something like this happens, I'll arrest you as a member of a Breaker—got it?"

Shirley looked at the Ring Gear on her left hand and tilted her head to one side in confusion.

There was something that was bothering her.

Shirley's words caused Ishounuma to bob his head up and down several times.

"I-I got it... I went a little too far with a joke. I won't do something like that again... then I'll see you in class, Sakurazaka-san!"

After seeing him off with a pout, Shirley fixed her eyes on her Ring Gear once his figure was out of sight.

"Did it disappear...?"

"What happened Shirley?"

"Ye-yeah. The crystal."

Chapter 3-3

As he was going up the stairs, he heard footsteps.

"You're always really loud, hey."

It was the elementary-school looking PE teacher and she was frowning.

"Ah, Micchan!"

"I told you to call me Midorikawa-sensei. It's you again, Sakurazaka."

"Nihaha."

"What are you doing here? Show me your Ring Gear record."

"Su-sure!"

Shirley waved her left hand and the Ring Gear window opened.

Masaki gave an explanation to the waiting Midorikawa-sensei.

"Err, Sakurazaka-san helped me out..."

"I don't need the testimony of a student. You could tell me in such a manner that's convenient for yourself, or you could be protecting someone else. Whichever it is, I can't trust your testimony. I'll make a judgment from the record of the Ring Gear."

"Is-is that so?"

Even so, Shirley hadn't done anything bad.

Masaki drew back what he was going to say.

On the contrary, Midorikawa-sensei asked him.

"That reminds me, Kusunoki-kun. A Breaker registration request came from you a while ago, was it some kind of mistake?"

"Huh?"

Midorikawa-sensei scratched her head, appearing troubled.

"I'll only explain it to you once, I'm the advisor for Breaker. But it's so dull."

"Okay, I see."

"Was the application a mistake? This is your first day here, right?"

"If there's anything I can do to help, I'd like to do it."

The teacher scrutinized him.

Shirley looked away from the window. She had a face that looked exactly like a kitten about to be fed.

"Really!? Masaki is going to join Breaker too!? Yay! Hey, hey, hey, you can be my partner—"

"Oh?"

"Since I heard that you were coming, I knew that I wanted to do this together with you. Our compatibility has been perfect since we were kids, hasn't it?"

"Well, I thought that too..."

They had managed to be successful with Shirley charging against their opponents and Masaki backing her up.

If he thought about it now, Shirley might have been so strong because she was unconsciously using her Dialect.

The girl who was smiling said "Ah," then frowned.

"I-I-I'd... like to be a pair with Masaki but I already have a partner."

It was just the thing that Masaki was waiting to hear.

Alice said they "separated" after that.

However, he couldn't believe that Shirley was the type of person to break up a friendship.

He wanted to make sure of it.

"You didn't work well with your partner?"

"Nihaha, we had a bit of an argument just now, but I made peace with her right after it. I can't really leave her alone~"

"You can't leave her alone? Did your partner leave you?"

"She didn't. We've been partners since first year and we've had about 30 arguments and cancelled our partnership a lot, but despite that, I think that we need each other."

Her shy-looking expression darkened.

"...Ah, but why did this happen? The crystal disappeared... is there a glitch?"

Shirley stared at her Ring Gear looking puzzled.

I'm relieved—Masaki thought.

"Of course, Shirley is still the Shirley that I knew. You haven't changed. You're not the kind of person who would abandon a friend."

"Nya? What? What are you saying?"

"Now that I've heard what you said, I can finally see the situation."

In short—

"Stop that tedious conversation right now!"

Midorikawa-sensei approached Shirley with a wrinkled forehead.

Then grabbed hold of Shirley's chest with both of her hands!

Tayuyun.

"Ginya?"

"Sakurazaka, explain why there's a hole in the wall right now! Show me your Ring Gear records!"

"Nnauu, I-I get it Micchan-sensei! So, let go of my breasssts!"

"Hiding it is so damn useless! I can't see your face when standing in front of you because these things are in the way. Don't mess around with me!"

"Nyafuu, why are you getting angry? "

"Show me~ Show me!"

"Iii, yeeessss!?"

Before his eyes, the shape of her soft and heavy breasts were being changed.

She played with them with her small hands, lifting them, pushing them and squeezing them.

She was only wearing her gym uniform, so you could see the swell of her chest more easily than in the blouse of her school uniform.

This person was tempting.

Masaki came to his senses and averted his eyes. He looked through the hole in the wall. As was often the case from the height of the twelfth floor, the view was obstructed by the neighboring buildings.

What was she going to say?

Yes, it was Shirley's.

Shirley's—



"Faan! Nhaa! Se, sensei! St... stop please, you'll destroy my boobs!"

Boobs.

No!

That's not it!

Masaki shook his head left and right.

He drove the voice of Shirley going "haun, haun" out of his consciousness.

He was going to sort out the story—

Sakurazaka Shirley was a Level 7 Dialect user who was a member of Breaker.

The committee had a system where everyone had a partner. Shirley's partner was Alice Clockheart. She was also Level 7.

It seemed that the name of their team was "Help Cat."

In the morning, Alice drove away the wiry young man that attacked Masaki. And, Shirley caught him. She had cast a flash of light that reached out into the sky.

When Ishounuma's fireball was smashed, it was the same Dialect that made the hole in the wall.

"If that's all, then you only have to say a few simple words, right."

"Haa...haa...haa..."

Shirley sank down onto the floor limply. Her strength was completely drained.

Tears were gathering in the corner of her eyes as she manipulated the window.

"Haa...haa... yes, I'll send it to you."

"Ge, do it in three seconds."

It seemed like Shirley and the teacher had completed the first stage of their exchange.

Masaki checked whether or not she was still breathing heavily.

"Shirley, you had a fight with Clockheart-san, didn't you?"

"Haa... uh huh? That's right but... huh? Did I say Alice's name?"

"No, there are various reasons."

"Really? I want you to tell me so that I'll know as well."

"It's difficult. Let's see... to start with, I'm... somehow a Level 7."

"Really? Of course. As expected of Masaki. And?"

It was a very indifferent reaction compared to Alice's. She really thought that Levels were just a number.

"When she found out that I was a Level 7, Clockheart-san called out to me."

Since he was in front of a teacher, he omitted the parts where he left the school building to go to a coffee shop and had a ride on the Orbit Ferris Wheel.

"Anyway, I made a contract with Clockheart-san and became her partner."

"Huh?"

Shirley tilted her head to the side slightly.

She looked like she didn't understand what he just said.

"I'm sorry. At that time, I didn't realize that you were paired with her. Or perhaps I should say that I didn't know that it was a contract..."

It was as if the normally energetic Shirley was there in body, but not in spirit.

She was in a daze.

Did his voice reach her?

"....."

"Are you alright?"

"That's... so the crystal!?"

Shirley lifted up her left hand to look at the Ring Gear.

It was a bangle with a rose-shaped relief. There had been a purple crystal on it before, but it was gone now.

Midorikawa-sensei checked the record that was displayed on the window.

"You, didn't you have a fight this morning and do 'Partner Cancellation'?"

"But the crystal hasn't ever disappeared before!"

"That's because Sakurazaka and Clockheart have never contracted with different partners. When you declare 'Cancellation,' it only registers as 'Possible Cancellation'; the procedure for officially cancelling partners is to contract with another partner, then the separation will be complete."

"Huh... then... me and Alice... are really no longer partners?"

"It seems like Clockheart has contracted with Kusunoki—Oi, wasn't anything recorded into Sakurazaka's data? Where is the sound and video?"

Shirley whined, ignoring the teacher's question.

"Whhhyyyyy——!!"

"Shirley, calm down."

"Uuu... the partnership with me is cancelled... and now Masaki is Alice's partner..."

"Sorry. You shouldn't have found out like this!"

"This feels really, uwaaaa!! Terrible!!!!"

It seemed like there were various feelings swirling around in her. Shirley collapsed onto the floor with a troubled look. She was like a child.

"Uwaaaaaaaaan!!"

"Shirley, listen to me. Let's have a good talk with Clockheart-san."

"Fue?"

"Judging from what I heard, I think that you've misunderstood each other. To start with, you should meet up with each other. Can you do it for your long-time partner? It's important to have faith in her."

"Ye-yeah... that's right—"

Shirley got up from the floor.

Midorikawa-sensei trampled down on her butt.

"Foot break!"

"Ginya!?"

Midorikawa-sensei's small feet squashed Shirley's butt over and over again. Supposedly, removing her shoes was adult-like.

"You, why wasn't anything recorded?! Is the Ring Gear data wrong or something!?"

"Eh? I sent something off successively about thirty minutes ago."

"Really? So what is this?"

"Ah~, stop stepping on my bum please, Micchan-sensei."

That reminded Masaki of something.

"Ishounuma said that he did something so that the Ring Gear wouldn't be able to record anything."

"Oh? What is that?"

"Well, I don't really understand but..."

"Ishounuma huh... I'll have a little talk with him. It's alright for you to go now. Get out now. Is there anything else you want from me?"

"Ah, yes!"

Shirley jumped up.

She quickly got away from Midorikawa-sensei who lifted her foot.

And went "Pon!"

"Ugyaaaaaa!"

Midorikawa-sensei tumbled down the stairs.

Masaki was shocked—the teacher turned around once in the air and made a magnificent landing like a circus performer.

"Sakurazaka, you bastard."

"Goodbye Micchan! See you tomorrow—"

"You little, you! You better be careful when going home!!"

"Al~right."

Those two had a peculiar way of communicating with each other.

But since they both smiled at each other, it must have been fine.

Shirley grasped Masaki's arm.

"Let's go back!"

"Yeah... ah, wait a minute! Are you going to change back into your uniform?"

"Ah, that's right. Come to think of it, I left my bag in the classroom!"

Masaki and Shirley dropped by the changing room and classroom, then left the school building.

Chapter 3-4

Roads spread out radially around the Administrator tower at the center of the floating academy city Canaan.

A circular beltway was connected to the main roads stretching from the center, like a spiderweb.

The school bus that travelled down a single road jolted to a stop after about 15 minutes.

By Shirley's guidance, they had finally arrived at a high class residential area where designer apartments were lined up.

It would probably take around three minutes to walk to the forest that surrounded the edge of the apartments.

It was a peaceful place far off from the station square and the central hustle and bustle.

"Does Clockheart-san live here?"

"Yeah."

He gasped at the high class mansion.

He didn't know whether they were real or not, but there were several surveillance cameras in the marble entrance. An AI receptionist controlled the automatic door.

Furthermore, there was a guard in front of the entrance, and when he bowed, Shirley greeted him with a "Good afternoon!"

Masaki also greeted him.

Shirley stood in front of the door and pushed the button on the intercom.

An electronic voice sounded out from the ceiling.

"Welcome back, Ojou-sama."

Nowadays there were synthetic voices that were indistinguishable from human voices. But people would be unnerved if they heard the sound of a human voice coming from a wall, so the AI voice was intentionally given a crude, electronic voice.

"I'm home! I have a friend with me today."

"Ah, good afternoon..."

"As you wish."

Masaki finally realized.

"Hey, do you live here too Shirley?"

"That's right. Didn't I say so before?"

"You didn't say that. You only said that we were going to Clockheart-san's home."

As they went through the entrance, Shirley opened her mouth to say "Ah."

"I didn't say that I lived together with Alice as well did I."

"It's called a roomshare¹"

"In the beginning, Alice lived here by herself. But when I leave that girl alone, she won't go to school, won't eat, and only listens to music and goes to coffee shops."

"Haha...it's probably like that."

His lukewarm words were detached from the world.

She had shown her feelings to Masaki and was finally able to have a conversation...even when he met her for the first time, he thought that the girl herself was the result of her Dialect.

He got onto the elevator with Shirley and went up to the top floor - the 30th floor.

"There are a lot of tall buildings in Canaan. I've had enough of getting onto elevators."

"The land is small. I've already gotten used to it since there are elevators everywhere. Do you think the stairs are better?"

"I love elevators!"

"I see."

She had a slightly disappointed look on her face.

Normally he would climb however many stairs there were, but since he had had a lot of trouble on the stairs today, he wanted to avoid them if he could.

¹ Sharing an apartment

When he got off the elevator on the top floor, the front door was immediately before his eyes.

It seemed like this floor was all Alice's room. It made it seem like there was a single house on the top floor of the high-rise building rather than an apartment.

For Masaki, he was surprised to see an apartment block with a structure like this.

The AI recognized Shirley and released the lock on the door automatically.

"I'm coming in, I'm coming in, I'm coming in."

"Please excuse me..."

This wasn't the first time that he had visited Shirley's home, but he hadn't entered the room of another girl before.

Masaki was feeling more than a little nervous in what he thought was Alice's room.

The entryway on the other side of thick, cobalt blue door was more like a lobby than an entryway.

A red and black checked carpet was spread out on the floor, and there were shoes on it.

Shirley went inside.

"Alice~~~!!"

Masaki followed her hesitantly.

Although Shirley appeared to have calmed down on the bus ride there, it looked like the Partner Cancellation was still worrying her. She moved deeper inside at a quicker pace while calling out the name of her friend.

"Alice! We need to have a little talk!"

With those words, a milk-colored door with a piano like polish opened.

Behind it was a world of fairy tales.

The floor was black and white checked, two of the walls were red, another wall was black, and there was also a window. An image of a large cat laughing was on the curtain.

On the ceiling, there were twinkling stars in a night sky that looked like a planetarium.

There was a large bed and a dresser.

There was a blonde girl sitting in front of the mirror.

It seemed like she had just finished taking a bath and was holding a comb in her left hand.

A suspended-style hair dryer was floating in the air, applying a breeze to her hair.

"...You're too noisy, Shirley. You're always—"

She turned her face around and stiffened.

Over Shirley's shoulder, Masaki's eyes met with Alice's.

She was definitely wearing panties, but she had nothing on top. She was practically in her birthday suit.

Her flowing blonde hair concealed her moderately sized breasts, leaving only a trace of roundness in her pure, snow-white skin.

It was as if she was a work of art and her navel was a sacred place.

There was a small mole on her side where her ribs floated to the surface.

She wore light blue knickers, and thin, well-proportioned legs that seemed like they would break if they were touched stretched down from her round bottom.

"....."

The girl's figure didn't move an inch, emphasizing her doll-like impression even more.

Masaki was also shock still.

The rest of his brain had frozen.

Shirley watched the two rigid figures.

"Huh, what's wrong? Masaki? Alice? Are you there?"

She waved her hand around in the air.

Masaki regained his awareness slightly faster.

He hurriedly tore his eyes away from her and drew back to a place in the room where he couldn't see her.



"I'm, I'm, I'm sorry!!"

The answer to his apologetic words were—

Alice's shriek.

But, it was accompanied by the sound of something being destroyed.

The head of a horse appeared from the room.

After a little time passed he noticed chess pieces too.

Shirley flew back with a force that was like being hit by a car.

"Gyan!?"

She was thrown against the wall of the corridor.

Masaki cried out reflexively.

"Shirley!?"

"Don't come!"

Masaki was stopped before he could rush over to get a better control of things.

He heard Alice's scream from the room.

"Nooooooooooooo——!!"

He heard the sound of a clock ticking.

Tick, tock, tick, tock...

He heard the creak of a door from somewhere.

The sound of trumpet going Puoooo~. Boisterous singing voices and lots of laughter gradually grew.

Wonder Carnival had finally turned up.

The knight who appeared first quickly disappeared among a succession of bishops, rooks and pawns jumping out from Alice's room. The huge chess pieces were bigger than Masaki.

Shirley who had just been blown away stood up with a hand against the wall. She laughed fearlessly and held out her fist.

"Yooouuu, I'll break you into pieces! With my fist! Staarr Blaast!!"

She threw her right fist that emitted a dazzling radiance.

The chess pieces were smashed!

"Daaaammit——"

She relentlessly crushed the Dialect fairies that were overflowing from Alice's room without any mercy.

The shockwave spread out, causing the walls and floor to crack.

He cried out in a panic.

"Hey, hey, isn't this dangerous!? The room is being reduced to nothing...!?"

"Of course! Calm down, Alice!"

"It is your fault! Shirley is so stupid!"

"What did you say!? The person that is stupid themself is calling me stupid!?"

It was just like a quarrel between children.

But, the damage being caused wasn't normal.

"Wait, Shirley you should calm down too! In the first place, you're also at fault since you didn't knock..."

"U!?"

Shirley, who had knocked down tens of fantasy beings, groaned.

Masaki also called out to Alice.

"Clockheart-san, I'm sorry for coming without arranging it with you first! If I'm being a bother, I'll go home since I don't want you to be angry!"

"....."

At last, the fantasy fairies stopped overflowing from the room.

That was the quarrel between fierce children.

The situation had become very bad.

The walls and floor were crumbling.

It was a terrible scene that could only be accepted in the floating city where the users of Dialect were gathered together.

Chapter 3-5

If it had been a building from before this era, it would have needed to be rebuilt.

However the apartment was a tenacious structure that had been designed with users of Dialect running wild in mind, and it was constructed in such a way that it was possible for every floor to be repaired separately.

The 30th floor would be completely replaced. Since the manager appeared to be used to strange things, it seemed like these kinds of things happened frequently.

So in the end, Masaki and the others moved to another room on the 27th floor.

"Clockheart-san... I wanted to ask you something..."

"...What might it be?"

Alice answered Masaki's question without meeting his eyes.

"Are you renting rooms on different floors? Or are you selling them?"

"...From the 1st to the 30th floor."

"All of it!? This apartment house is all your residence!?"

Alice nodded.

Shirley added an explanation.

"At first it was a single house. But Alice doesn't like being surrounded by noise, and the rooms get smashed up like this often."

"...Somebody wrecked it."

"It's my fault!? The person who always loses their temper and Globalizes is Alice!"

"...The walls of the apartment are fortified with Anti-Dialect. Shirley is the one who always breaks the walls."

"What?"

Masaki was shocked.

"Could you at least hold back so that you don't end up destroying your home?"

"...I'm not good at going easy on people."

"Since Dialect is an image, making it strong is not much different from making it weak, so it's difficult to control. That's what the teacher said."

"I see. If that's the case, then all the more reason you should stop having arguments."

"O~kay!"

"...I didn't mean to smash up all those rooms."

Still there wasn't any damage in the living room on the 27th floor that he had been led to.

Because of Alice's hand, a stuffed toy on top of the bookshelf fell down.

It was a rabbit dressed in a tuxedo holding a clock in its hand. When he looked closer, he saw that it was an analog clock, which was rare these days.

Peaceful classical music flowed through the room. It wasn't an orchestra, it was a solo violin.

Three teacups and a single teapot had been prepared on the triangular tables.

Alice sat down on a small chair that was shaped like an open shell. Shirley sat down on the carpet without even using a zabuton¹.

Masaki was given a soft cushion.

"Displeasure" seemed to be written all over the face of the silent Alice.

As would normally be the case, she was now completely dressed. Instead of the blue dress from the morning, she now wore a short-sleeved blouse along with a black and white checked jumper dress. A red ribbon was tied up on her chest.

Alice drank her tea with a disappointed expression.

"...Masaki-kun."

"What is it?"

"Just now you didn't see anything... is that fine? That you didn't see anything."

"A-ah... you're right. Of course."

"Very well."

With a nod, Alice looked down to hide her expression as she lifted the teacup to her lips.

And then, the topic changed.

¹ Japanese cushion for sitting

"...As for Shirley, can't she do anything about shouting out the name of her Dialect. I think that it looks childish. It's embarrassing."

"But I always say it. I'm just shouting out the name of my special move!"

"That's illogical. I don't understand."

"And Alice should think about the order of the fairies that she brings out, you know— ah, is that a cake? She should send out her defensive fairies first, and then the fast ones from the left and right to surround the others. "

"I brought Chiffon Cake... Like I'm always saying, the fairies come out of their own accord."

Shirley opened the fridge and took out the cake.

"Oh, it's cut into three pieces! Nice! Since it's your special move, you should learn to control it, you know."

"Please bring a fork too... Shirley should stop firing light unnecessarily."

"Nihaha, when I hit something it ends up flying! Right, here's a fork. Here's yours Masaki."

He thanked her and accepted it.

Shirley sat down then the three of them started to eat the chiffon cake.

"Mm... the taste is quite good... it's Shirley's fault that the room is useless once again. Please give me the proper compensation."

"Eh!? If we're talking about how it started, it's the fault of Alice who used Wonder Carnival, isn't it? Fuwa, this is so delicious."

For a moment, the conversation between the two of them was suspended as they ate the cake.

Masaki also decided to eat his.

It was surely delicious. It wasn't a bad thing to have such a shop close by. Although Masaki had boasted about the taste of his crème brûlée to Alice—he thought that he should devote more time to perfecting it.

Alice had eaten about half of her slice, and she once again drank from her teacup.

"If you're talking about 'how it started'... Shirley, who opened the door without knocking, is at fault."

"But I never knock on the door, right?"

Shirley's plate had been emptied in the blink of an eye, and she drained her cup of now lukewarm tea in an instant.

Is that alright—Masaki thought to himself, choosing not to say it out loud.

"...You never do... but Masaki wasn't there before. "

"Ah, that's right! He wanted to talk to you! Why did you form a partner contract with Masaki!?"

"...It's a mystery to me that Masaki-kun is a close friend of Shirley. Since he just transferred today."

"We're childhood friends."

"...Huh?"

Masaki nodded then took charge of the conversation.

"We went to the same elementary school. Shirley transferred to Canaan seven years ago. And I transferred today."

Shirley puffed out her cheeks.

"It's cruel to change partners without saying anything Alice!"

"...Shirley is the one who declared 'cancellation'."

"We always do that! Then we always make up at dinner!"

"...You're the only one who thinks that... since you always look like you've completely forgotten about it, I have no choice but to go along with it."

"Eh!? So it's still bothering you after all this stuff happened? All these 30 or so times?"

Shirley's eyes wandered around in an attempt to remember something.

Alice sighed.

"...This morning was the 36th time. After we formed a partner contract last year... we've cancelled it 36 times."

"Hold on a minute! Alice suggested it as well, right!? Are you trying to make only me look bad!?"

"Since Shirley destroys things too much, I always get angry at her."

"This morning, your stupid cat and stupid bird ruined the classroom, right!"

"How cruel... Shirley is the only one that doesn't want to be called stupid..."

"I don't really understand but right now you just insulted me! That's the impression I got! That's so rude—!!"

They continued arguing.

Masaki left them for the time being since it wasn't a quarrel that involved the use of Dialect to attack each other.

He slowly savored the taste of the cake and tea.

The just-right taste of the chiffon cake spread in his mouth and the fragrance of bergamot drifted into his nostrils.

Pure bliss!

"Ah, this is really delicious."

"Masaki listen to me too!!"

Shirley's eyes looked like upside-down triangles.

Alice also gave him a sharp look.

"...The look on your face is saying that you're not involved. That's a problem."

"Hmm? Can I talk now?"

"If you want to say something, there's no need to hold back."

"...If you would like to live long enough to go back home, you should choose your words carefully."

Both of them stared at him.

He winced involuntarily.

He didn't find being stared at scary, rather, it was the reverse...

He didn't know what it was like to be put in the spotlight by people, and until then he hadn't met people that stood out to him as much as Alice and Shirley. When Alice's sapphire-like eyes and Shirley's amber eyes lined up together and met his, the feeling was intensified.

Masaki felt totally shy and turned his eyes away from them.

"Err... to-to start with, I don't know anything about the quarrels that happened in the past... so I can't tell you to forgive and forget. But despite that you still live together. So it doesn't mean that you're on bad terms with each other, right? There's no such thing as a perfect human being, so shouldn't you forgive each other? "

"Mu..."

Alice was lost in thought.

Shirley looked nonchalant.

"In the first place, I can't remember all the reasons behind all of our fights."

"That's the kind of personality you have."

"Nihaha!"

"Gu... so I was the only one that was troubled."

Alice spoke in a tired voice. The feeling of wasted effort hung in the air.

"So, let's leave all of that in the past. Next is the confirmation of the present condition—I made a contract as Alice's partner and am in 'Pre-Registration' with Breaker. Since I asked Midorikawa-sensei, I might not have been registered officially yet..."

"...I'm Masaki-kun's partner and naturally I'm an official member of Breaker."

Alice laughed lightly and gave a delightful smile.

It was a smile like a flower blooming.

Masaki remembered this expression. It was like the time when Masaki said that he didn't have a lot of things. That blooming flower was surely a black rose.

Shirley looked like she was chewing something bitter.

"Uu... I don't have a partner so maybe I'll be Pre-Registration or one of the Supporters. Because it's a rule that it has to be a pair."

"Fufu... Masaki-kun, what do you think? The fragrance of this tea is quite good, right... I ordered it from an English specialty store."

"Oh, is that so. Which shop is it?"

"Fortnum and Mason."

"Isn't that a high class shop that supplies goods to the British royal family? That's amazing."

"Hey? Weren't you listening to me!? I'm in a really lonely situation, right? I don't understand what you two are talking about."

Shirley's eyes teared up.

Alice was in an unusually good mood.

"...It's isn't bad to have someone who can understand things about tea. For Shirley, everything that she drinks is the same to her."

"Eeh!? I can tell whether it's delicious or not you know!"

"You always say that the tea is 'delicious' no matter what shop we go to."

That's mean, Masaki thought.

"Although she might not be able to say whether the tea leaves or tea cup are good or not, she can still tell whether the taste is good or not."

"I-I know! However, delicious is delicious, right!?"

"...Then what tea did we have today?"

"Uu!?"

Shirley faltered.

On that subject, the liveliness with which she was eating her cake with died down. With that, the cake wouldn't taste like anything as well.

Masaki gave a bitter smile.

"Well, it doesn't matter. To me, it's more important to say that it's delicious than to taste it."

"...I guess that's true."

"Well, I was able to confirm the current situation—now let's talk about what will happen after this. I'll say it plainly; my Dialect is fundamentally different in terms of its practical use from your Dialects. I was honestly surprised when I came to Canaan and saw other people's Dialect for the first time."

In his childhood, Masaki might have seen Shirley's Dialect but not have been able to understand it. Although when her right fist started to shine, sparks of light didn't fly from it back then.

"...You're saying that it is fundamentally different... do you mean that it isn't suited for battle? Is it a movement type or searching type?"

"If that's the case, shouldn't it have some kind of use?"

Masaki shook his head at their words.

"It's also not like that. Anyway, it's unreasonable for me to catch rule breakers that are using Dialect. So wouldn't it be more efficient for Clockheart-san and Shirley to be a team in the same manner as before in order to work for Breaker?"

The two girls exchanged glances with each other.

Alice cut her eyes aloofly and Shirley pouted.

"...Does that mean that you're insisting that I cancel the partnership with you and form a contract with Shirley? There's no need to talk in a roundabout way if you don't want to be a pair with me."

"I'm honored that you chose me to be your partner."

"...And?"

"Huh?"

"...How strange."

"What is it?"

Alice stared at him intensely.

"...You called Shirley by her first name. You should also call me by my first name. But you're still calling me that. Why is it 'Clockheart-san'? Are you trying to imply that you want to keep some distance between us?"

"No-no-no, that is... I only just met you today..."

"That's fine... it means that the king is alone."

She turned her eyes to look out the window.

Shirley burst into laughter.

"Ahaha, Alice you-you're still saying that you're a king?!!"

"...It's a fact. Since my partner doesn't call me by my first name, I'm isolated..."

Masaki admitted defeat.

He didn't want to make her feel estranged by calling her by her surname.

"Oh, I get it! Since you contracted with me, I'll call you by your first name!"

"...It's natural. Since you call Shirley by her first name, you should address me by my first name too."

She was being rebellious at a strange time.

Maybe she was a very competitive person.

He had grown used to calling Shirley by her first name from when they were children, but he wasn't comfortable calling another girl by her first name.

However, with the current mood, he couldn't say that it was embarrassing now.

"Then... let's see... A-A-Alice... san."

"...san?"

"Ah, no—A-Alice... is that okay? Is it alright?"

Masaki's face heated up. Her cheeks colored slightly after letting him say it.

"...Hafuu... that's more than I thought..."

"Are you okay?"

"...Never mind. It's not a problem at all. There can't be any problem. Absolutely."

She looked composed while her face reddened, but her lips twitched slightly.

Shirley tapped Masaki's shoulders.

"Hey-hey!"

"Hm? What is it?"

"Just like you said her name, say my name!"

"Your name? What do you mean?"

"Just do it!"

"Hmm? Shirley... is that fine?"

"That's different! It's completely different!"

He didn't understand what she meant.

Since it seemed like their conversation was going to be derailed endlessly, Masaki put it back on its course.

"Anyway, about the partner contract. I checked the regulations of Breaker while I was moving, and it seemed like being by myself in the Supporters is fine. I have a feeling that role is suitable for me."

"Ah, then let's do our best while you're there, right?"

Alice snarled at Shirley's proposal.

"That is inferior work. It isn't the kind of work that's fit for a Level 7."

"It isn't inferior. I keep on saying that we're all comrades in the same committee. Just the roles differ."

"...Do you want to steal away my partner, Shirley?"

"Steal? I didn't want to say it, but it looks like I have to say it after all! You tricked Masaki into forming a contract with you, didn't you!?"

".....What you just said is illogical."

Alice brought her teacup to her lips to cover her facial expression.

Shirley pointed at Alice forcefully.

"You deceived him!"

"Masaki-kun, would you like another helping of tea?"

"Hey, Alice! Since Masaki is my childhood friend, I promised earlier that I would show him around the academy!"

"...Just because he is your childhood friend, it doesn't mean that you own him... or could it be that you're engaged?"

"Ha!?"

Shirley was struck speechless and her cheeks turned red.

"No, I haven't made that kind of promise in particular with Masaki, or perhaps I should say it's not like that..."

"That-that's right."

After that exchange, Alice had an embarrassed look on her face as well.

Masaki put the tea cup and saucer back on the table, making a refreshing clink sound.

The classical music changed right at that moment.

"You two have derailed the topic quite a few times now."

"...It's Shirley's fault."

"That's normal for a girl!"

"What do you think of my suggestion? I think that having Alice and Shirley as a pair would be best."

"...I have a problem with that assumption. Masaki-kun is lacking in knowledge concerning Dialect. I can't be persuaded that an ability judged to be Level 7 has no practical use."

"Ah, that's right! You don't understand because you haven't seen it."

The opinions of both of them were plausible.

Masaki straightened his back.

"I got it. I'll show you now since it isn't dangerous."

"This is as exciting as watching a magic show, isn't it!?"

"...Will we appear on the roof?"

"It's safe. And it isn't a conjuring trick. Well, you should be satisfied..."

He took a deep breath.

He closed his eyes; it was necessary for him to concentrate for a little while.

Masaki raised both of his hands like an orchestra conductor.

"Welcome—"

Chapter 3-6

The world was superscripted by an illusion.

In an instant Alice and Shirley's living room, their location, was changed to the open sky of outdoors.

Roses were blooming in profusion all around them, and a refined fragrance filled the area.

Petals swirled with the wind in a sublime dance.

It was Rose Garden.

Masaki and the others were standing in a circle cut off from the rose-beds that surrounded it. The circumference of the circle was about five meters. It wasn't very wide.

Although the roses surrounding them were as tall as their chest, there was a grass arch in one direction, and continuing from it was a rose promenade.

"Welcome, to my world."

The smiling Masaki was wearing a black and white tailcoat. He held a silver tray in his hand.

The look of shock on Alice's face was so clear that anyone could understand it.

Shirley suddenly left the round plaza, passed through the arch and left the promenade.

"This is amazing! How did you do this!?"

"... It's not... an illusion. I don't think that this is anything but real. It should be evening soon and yet it's so bright... this isn't summer sunlight either. Where is this place?"

"It's already evening in summer Canaan. You can spend your whole day here and it will still be daytime. Rain doesn't fall too."

"Alice~~~! Roses! This place is full of roses~~~!!"

Shirley shouted from a distance with a voice loud enough to reach the depths of the rose garden.

A fence with ivy coiled around it could be seen in the distance at the one of the edges the flower garden.

"It will take about 20 minutes for you to reach the fence. Even if you climbed over the fence and went out, you probably wouldn't find a gate."

"...Is this what is called a transfer-type Dialect? Which foreign country did we move to from Canaan?"

"That's what I thought at first, but it's probably different. If you watch this, you'll see the reason."

Masaki turned his eyes and a table appeared on top of the lawn.

It was a round wooden table with a knit-grass design. And two chairs of the same style.

It hadn't been there until a moment ago.

Alice returned to her usual emotionless face.

"...It's just like fairy-tale magic. However, if you moved us here, then it would be possible for you to move the table, right."

"Well, take a seat. I'll be bringing the tea soon. You can have as much cake as you like. Would you like a cookie?"

Alice sat down on the chair.

From the tray he held in one hand, Masaki put down glasses of water, spread out a napkin, and lined up teaspoons.

Since he was waiting on them, he only put two sets.

An out of breath Shirley came back.

"Ha...ha... it's amazing Alice! It's really big!"

"I'll understand if I see it."

"Hey-hey, where did you run off to that ended up with you getting leaves on your head?"

Masaki took out the small leaves that were entwined in her hair.

"I didn't mean to, but I ended up peering into a bush."

"Your face wasn't scratched by the rose thorns, was it?"

"Ahaha, I'm fine. Since the thorns of the roses don't have poison."

"That's not a problem. I'm going to serve the tea now so sit down."

"Ri~ght."

After she sat down in the chair, Shirley looked around restlessly.

Masaki took out a small hand bell from his breast pocket, held it in his fingertips and shook it.

The sound of the bell rung out.

"...Is there a waiter?"

"If you see this, I think you'll understand that my Dialect isn't a transfer-type."

A sound rose out of the background and approached.

Both of the girls turned their eyes to the grass arch.

A rabbit the size of a human child appeared.

But it walked skilfully on its two hind legs. It wore a red waistcoat and had a bow tie on its chest.

It was holding a silver tray in its front legs with a perfectly laid out teapot and teacups.

"Wooow! It's so cuuuute!"

Shirley shouted in a merry voice.

Masaki nodded joyfully.

"That's a relief."

"....."

Alice was silent.

He started to get anxious about whether or not she liked it.

Masaki took the teacup and teapot from the rabbit that had come close. The rabbit was a little too short to place it on the table.

He placed the teacups on the table and then poured the tea from the teapot carefully.

As for the tea, every time it was poured into a cup, its flavor would change.

"Enjoy."

"Ah! It smells like roses! Right!?"

Masaki nodded at Shirley's words. It seemed like she was trying to savor it because of the conversation from before. It was delightful for the person who served it.

He chose the rose-flavored tea this time.

Alice brought the teacup to her lips without saying a word.

All expression vanished from her face.

"....."

"Erm, Alice, are you alright?"

She looked like she was gazing into the distance. Or you could say that she seemed absent-minded or half asleep.

".....Ah..."

"Hey, are you alright Alice?"

"...A land of dreams?"

"What are you saying?"

Masaki tilted his head to the side. Alice blushed.

"...It's, it's nothing. A-Anyway, this place definitely seems like Dialect. Or perhaps I should say that this place has already become the world itself."

"Ah, it seems like that. I was wondering whether or not other people would also get that kind of feeling."

Shirley waved her hand from side to side.

Alice seemed to have the same opinion too.

"...This is the first time that I've seen such a magnificent Dialect. Also, there's no scope for it to oppose us Level 7s."

"I can choose who I want to invite here. But it's more difficult when the number of people increases."

"In addition, we should have been sitting down... when we were summoned to this place, we were standing up."

"That's true."

Masaki groaned.

Honestly, he didn't understand the fine details of it.

"Well, somehow or another, it seems like I'm able to invite people to my impression of a garden restaurant. In that situation, wouldn't it be strange to be sitting on the lawn?"

"...The fantasy that I actualize is characters from fairy tales. It's a little like the rose garden that you actualized."

"Really. It might be a little close to my hobby."

Shirley raised her hand.

"What about me!?"

"Rays of light fly out of your right fist, right?"

"Yeah! It can pierce through anything!"

"...There's nothing similar about it."

Alice declared it bluntly.

Shirley was about to object, but, it seemed like she couldn't come up with anything to argue her point.

Masaki arranged the biscuits another rabbit had brought on the table.

When the rabbits finished what they were doing, they stood quietly in a line close to the plaza. They were motionless like large stuffed animals.

A sweet, appetizing aroma was rising from the freshly made biscuits.

The eyes of the two girls brightened. Shirley was the first one to start eating them.

"It's so delicious! It's so delicious!"

"...Is this also an illusion? Is the taste of this tea from a shop?"

Alice started on it once she understood that it seemed to be fine.

Masaki didn't really understand the reason but he made a preface.

"I think that it's probably the biscuits that I've cooked before. I can only serve cuisine that I've previously made."

"...Eh!? Masaki made these cookies?"

"If I had the tools... That's why I want a large kitchen. I want to increase my repertoire even more."

"Come to think of it, cooking is one of Masaki's strong points. Like his puddings."

"Hahaha, when I was a kid, I only mixed it then refrigerated it. I miss those times."

Before long—

The biscuits on top of the plates had disappeared and the teacups were empty.

The two girls sat around the table in a dream-like state.

While standing up straight one of them gently brushed the teacup as if she was enjoying a lingering memory.

Another one looked up into the sky with her back to the chair.

"This is paradise isn't it?"

"...There's a Dialect like this."

"I'm happy that it pleases you."

"Ah, come to think of it, what is the name of this place?"

"The name? I haven't decided yet. But I call it 'Rose Garden'."

"Eh~ isn't that too ordinary? How about Rabbit Restaurant!?"

"Well, I think the roses are the distinctive trait..."

"Then, Rabbit Rose Restaurant!"

"It sounds like you're misunderstanding things a little."

By the way, the ribbed part of meat is called Baraniku¹.

The rabbits close to them that heard that drew back.

Alice shook her head.

"...That's nonsense. We should be paying more attention to the fact that this world is his Dialect rather than rabbits, restaurants and rose gardens."

"Eh~, then what name do you think would be good Alice?"

"...The gate invites people to another world... in other words, the gate... that's right... Gate of Rabbit."

¹ Baraniku is what the Japanese call spare ribs. Bara = rose, niku = meat. Pun? :D

The rabbits again!? They must be extremely popular rabbits, Masaki thought to himself.

"Well, the name doesn't really matter, right?"

"That's no good!"

"...It's important."

"Really? Ah, it will be time soon. We can't stay for very long."

The chimes of a bell could be heard in the distance.

Clang, clang, clang...

"This sounds a bit like a wedding bell —"

Before Shirley finished what she was saying, the landscape around them changed.

They were back in the room they had been in before, the living room of Alice and Shirley's home. In front of them was a triangular table.

Masaki dropped his raised hand like a conductor.

"What do you think?"

"Nihhyaaaa! That was brilliant, Masaki!"

Shirley's smile filled her whole face. She was sitting cross-legged on the floor. Because she was still wearing the skirt of her school uniform, Masaki found it a little difficult to find a place to look at her.

"...That wasn't bad."

Alice sat on a zaisu². She was looking up at the rabbit stuffed toy on the shelf. She confirmed that it was holding an analog watch in its hand.

"...Time has gone by at the right pace."

"I don't think that it's a dream or illusion. Is your stomach full?"

"...It is."

"Nihaha, today it's full of delicious food!"

"...Masaki-kun, what happens if you use it in a bus or train?"

"When I come back I'm the same spot as when I left. I wonder if it'd be a little dangerous to invite the driver."

Since the buses and trains were assisted by AIs, an accident probably wouldn't happen.

Alice was lost in thought.

"...Well then, for example, what about if Shirley was about to hit Masaki-kun?"

"That's not nice."

"Is it possible for you to escape into Gate of Rabbit by yourself?"

"I think it's possible. But it's impossible for me to escape the moment before I'm hit since I need time to concentrate to use it."

"...It's not good for an emergency escape."

² Zaisu is style of Japanese chair that has a chair back, but lacks legs and sits directly on the floor.

After all, its practical use was evaluated to be low.

Shirley clapped her hands.

"Then, what about if you invite a rule-breaker? They won't be able to escape, right!?"

"I've never gone to the other side of that fence, so maybe?"

"Why don't you try it out?"

"What would I do if I can't come back?"

"Uwa~ No way!!"

"...We can't make a person go missing. We're Breaker, not executioners or hit men."

"That's right."

Do they understand now? thought Masaki as he watched them.

Alice breathed a sigh and Shirley shrugged her shoulders.

"...I haven't seen a Dialect that could be called exceptional. I wouldn't hesitate to recognize it as Level 7... but it isn't cut out for the work of Breaker."

"You're jumping to conclusions, aren't you!?"

"Do you understand now? Then in the same way as before, you two—"

"...I refuse."

"Eh!?" responded both Masaki and Shirley, surprised by Alice's words.

She stood up from the zaisu and left for one of her rooms on another floor.

"...Masaki-kun is my partner... I decided that before I even saw your Dialect. Are you going to quit before you even try it once?"

"That isn't the reason why..."

"...Are you unhappy that you're my partner?"

"Not at all!"

"Then the 'talk about what will happen after this' is finished..."

"Huh-well-but... hey?"

"Wait, Alice. What about me!?"

Naturally, Shirley didn't stay silent. Alice looked back at her with cold eyes.

"...I don't plan on handing anything over to you."

"Whatever you say to me, I don't plan on handing this over —Sakurazaka Shirley is Alice Clockheart's friend! That won't change!"

She beat her chest. Her words were accompanied with a thump.

"Wha...!?"

"Even if we have fights, even if we're not partners, the fact that I can't leave you alone won't change! "

"...You are... a fool. I changed partners without telling you, stole your childhood friend, and you're still saying that we're friends?"

"That has nothing to do with it. Friendship isn't something that is measured in terms of loss and gain. Whether or not you need me, you're still important to me! That's a friend!"

Shirley's shoulders shook cheerfully.

Alice turned her back to her and bit her lip.

"...As I thought... you're an idiot. A strange person. I could even say that you're a deviant."

"That-that much?"

"I'm not your partner anymore... there are lots of rooms, so there's no need for you to leave... goodbye."

She left the room.

Shirley saw her off by waving one of her hands.

"Good night."

"Ah, are you going to sleep soon?"

"...Yes."

"I see. Then, see you tomorrow. Good night."

The door closed at the same moment that Masaki finished speaking.

It wasn't evening yet, so he thought that it was early for her to go to sleep, but he couldn't do anything about it.

"Ah, once she enters her room, she doesn't come out till the next morning."

"Really?"

"What are you going to do Masaki? Will you stay?"

"Hey-hey... I'll leave of course. About the matter of partners, I think we'd better talk more about it together, but we can't do it today."

"Yeah! Well, see you tomorrow. Should I walk you home?"

"The opposite of that is normal, you know."

"That?"

She escorted him up to the entrance. Since he had the Ring Gear, he would be able to get home by himself without getting lost.

Masaki waved his hand and said "See you tomorrow."

Shirley responded with "See you later!"

She hasn't changed since she was a child has she, Masaki thought.

Chapter 3 Intermission

A lone boy entered a room labeled "Student Counseling."

He was a young man with a squareish face, short, evenly cut hair and a well built, muscular body. He had an intimidating look in his eyes as if he was scowling.

He was Ishounuma.

Even when Ishounuma's eyes were focused on him, the man waiting in the guidance room didn't falter at all.

The man wore round glasses and a white coat over a business suit.

"Hi, I've been waiting."

"I was called by Midorikawa and she almost found out about the application."

"I'm not here to talk about inessential things. But it was discussed in the staff meeting... well, if there isn't any evidence, you can't be punished."

"I know that but..."

"Do you want to request something from me?"

The man's voice was calm but Ishounuma was clearly agitated.

He used his sleeve to wipe the sweat off of his forehead despite the air-conditioning in the room working perfectly fine.

"If I get that thing from you, I would be able to stand at the top of Class A. But that self-important Clockheart and Sakurazaka are special."

Chapter 3 Intermission

"Oh?"

"And that bastard is Level 7!"

"Kusunoki-kun? His Dialect is very interesting. But the practical use of it is questionable... with such an influential thing—"

"Then I can't beat him!?"

"Did you get into a fight? I don't care about that. It would probably be a complete victory if you used your ability, since your Dialect is suitable for battles."

Ishounuma gulped.

He ground his teeth.

"That bastard is always with Sakurazaka. And sometimes he's with Clockheart."

"A trio of Level 7s, huh? This has become very interesting."

"If I had more power..."

"If you had a powerful ability that could surpass Sakurazaka-kun's? What would you do? Do you want that ability?"

Ishounuma glared at the man with abnormal-looking eyes.

"...I want it."

"Kukuku... I'm not happy about the number of samples I've had so far. For the sake of a lost lamb, won't you collaborate with me?"

"Bu-but, the money..."

Chapter 3 Intermission

"That's fine. So far, I've been working with considerable research funds. I'll let you have this free of charge."

"Are you serious!?"

The man in the white coat waved his Ring Gear and a window opened.

He started up a calculator application and input numbers into several columns.

"Put your arm out."

"Yes!"

Ishounuma held out his arm in an excited state. There was a Ring Gear fitted with a snake relief.

The man in the white coat's Ring Gear had a design with an angel's wing on an apple.

They touched.

A window opened up giving information about the immediate transfer of data.

"Kukuku... Taste it well, the Fruit of Wisdom that will lead you to the truth of the world."

Chapter 4-1

—*Why did this happen?*

Masaki wondered this as he walked the short distance from the bus stop to the school's entrance.

The staring eyes around him were painful.

There was a parasol in his left hand.

But since it was a girly black parasol decorated with lots of frills, he didn't open it. Alice used it so that she could block out the sunlight.

"Hey, Alice... aren't you going to hold your optical illusion parasol?"

"...I'm feeling black today."

"Come to think of it, wasn't it white before?"

If it was an optical illusion, it would be simple to change such a thing.

This morning, Alice and Shirley came on the bus together. Since they lived in the same place, it was a natural thing to do.

When they got off from the bus, the parasol was handed over to him with a "...Hold it." The school entrance wasn't too far away, but he thought that it might have had some kind of meaning so he held onto it.

There must have been a meaning.

From Masaki's point of view, it seemed like they were well-known.

No matter how you looked at it, he was a servant.

Even just holding the parasol of one of the most well-known girls in the school attracted lots of negative attention. To make the situation even worse, another girl was pulling on his right hand.

"Masaki, what will you do for lunch today? Hey, I recommend the buffet on the 53rd floor!"

"Hey, Shirley, are you going to stop pulling on my hand?"

"Nihaha!"

She laughed abundantly.

Masaki walked to the front, holding Shirley's right arm. Masaki left his arm as it was and increased his pace.

Alice was walking slowly at her own pace, and Masaki was holding the parasol and pulling Shirley from behind.

"Ah, it's similar."

"Yeah?"

"...What is it?"

"The large dog being taken for a walk in the neighborhood. Another guy was doing it for the old man with the bad back, but as soon as they left the house, the dog started to run, pulling hard on the lead."

"Heh, that dog isn't disciplined is it. So how do we look similar?"

"...It's a stupid dog."

Even though a conversation like this was taking place, from a bystander's point of view, it looked like they were on good terms with each other.

As soon as they reached the classroom, boys started to gather around.

"Uh, hey, Kusunoki-san."

"Huh? In this school, you add "san" to other boy's names?"

"No... I'm just showing you respect."

"You just said something ridiculous. It's fine for you to address me without honorifics as you would normally. If you like, you can call me 'Masaki'."

"N-No, that's too much! Are Kusunoki-san, Sakurazaka-san and Clockheart-san on good terms with each other?"

He used honorifics for some reason.

They still hadn't gotten to know each other very well. Since he was a transfer student, it would be hard to get used to him.

"We've become partners in Breaker. But I think that the combination of Alice and Shirley is better."

"Eh!?"

"Ah... eh, right now... that is to say..."

Masaki just called them by their first names.

The voices of the others was rising and falling like a wave.

"Hey, he isn't using 'san'!" "Did he just call her 'Alice'!?" "Wait a minute! If Clockheart-san hears that, will she kill him!?" "Kusunoki-kun is sick! It's true that he's a Level 7!" "It seems like he and Sakurazaka-san are childhood friends, but the Queen..." "If he's the Queen's partner... then he's the King."

On that day he received the nickname "King."

It was really discomforting.

Since his hobby was making confectionary, he had been affectionately called "Patissier" and "Cookie" as pet names in his previous school.

This was wrong.

Masaki wanted to have a friendly conversation with his male classmates. When it was break time, he went to where a few of them were gathered.

"Hey, if it's okay with you guys, could we have lunch together?"

"Huh? Uh, King... in the school cafeteria?"

"You can use my name. Yes, Sakurazaka-san wanted to go to the buffet on the 53rd floor, but I don't think we should go there together."

He tried not to call her by her first name in front of other people.

But his classmates were indecisive.

"So... you won't be going with Clockheart-san...?"

"Ah, well, maybe."

Shirley said that she couldn't leave him alone, so she wasn't the type to let him eat alone. Masaki was also the same. Because they were friends.

His classmates shook their heads.

"We should accept only the King's sentiments! Or rather that's overdoing it a little... how should I put it, we would be out of place— right!?"

He was asking for agreement, so everyone around him nodded their heads.

"Yeah! Eating lunch with Hell Cat is too dangerous!" "Hey you!" "Idiot! Don't get us involved in this! Please excuse me, King. This guy is an idiot!"

Masaki waved his hand around frantically.

It seemed like they were more afraid of "Help Cat" than Masaki had imagined.

He gave the most courteous and pleasant smile that he could.

"Haha... S-Sorry. It takes time for those two to calm down... I understand how you feel. Erm... let's do this next time."

Masaki dropped his shoulders as he thought *This is different from what I imagined it would be before I transferred.*

If his friends from his old school told him "You're being called King," he would either burst out laughing or worry about being bullied.

He left his classmates and returned to his own seat.

The moment he sat down to prepare for the next lesson, his Ring Gear started flashing.

"What is it?"

A window opened.

An email had arrived.

"Can you come to classroom 2808 during lunch break? I'd like to have a discussion with you alone."

The sender was—Minamishima Miyako.

Who is that? Masaki thought as he tilted his head to the side in confusion.

He thought about it for a little and then remembered that she was one of the girls in his class.

In the morning, his classmates had introduced themselves to him, but he didn't remember all of their names yet.

However, he remembered her since he talked to her by herself in the first PE class.

She was sitting about three seats away diagonally from him and was looking around the classroom.

When he looked at her, she turned away.

She had a hairpin in her flowing, shoulder-length hair. She had a tender atmosphere around her.

She must have had quite a strong Dialect to be in this class, but she looked so normal that he wouldn't have noticed her if he passed by her in town.

Her expression darkened a little.

She gave off the feeling of having something that troubled her.

"Hmm..."

Yesterday, they had only had a short conversation with each other, as well as the discussion with the others; he didn't have the slightest idea about what was going on but—the mail was probably sent with the hope that he'd be reliable. It would be inexcusable for him to turn her down coldly.

Masaki sent an e-mail to Shirley saying "I have something to take care of at lunch. I'll be a little late so you can start eating without me."

Chapter 4-2

Lunch break—

Shirley was anxious to go to lunch together, but she held back since she had someone with her.

As for Alice, she looked like she wasn't caring about anything as she faced the elevator.

After Masaki saw them off as they got on to the elevator going up, he immediately got on to the elevator going down.

He got off on the 28th floor and went towards the designated classroom 2808.

This floor was filled with mostly empty classrooms. It seemed like they were used for club activities after school.

"Ah... this is..."

Masaki had reached classroom 2808.

It was the classroom on the left hand side of the innermost part of the corridor—the place where the wiry young man had cornered him.

The ceiling and walls should have been wrecked due to Alice's Dialect.

Yellow tape with the words "No Entry!" was stuck on the door. However one part was slightly torn off so he opened the door slightly.

Where was the girl that wanted to talk with him? thought Masaki, dissatisfied.

"Well, maybe I'll understand if I go in."

He opened the door.

No one was there.

Safety equipment seemed to have been taken out the class and the scattered table and chairs were no longer there. There was just the wreckage of the fallen ceiling and wall which had been reduced to rubble and the smashed desks and chairs.

In the ruins of the center of the classroom, a silver bangle flickering with silver light fell.

"What is this?"

He advanced while taking care not to fall down due to the unstable footing. He heard the sound of things breaking and the rubble under his feet.

He picked up the bangle.

It was a Ring Gear that had a relief in the shape of a flower.

Attached to it was a crystal which was the proof of a Partner Contract. The crystal was pale yellow.

"Who does this belong to?"

"—Minamishima."

"!?"

Masaki spun around to face the male voice that he heard behind him.

Ishounuma had come in. There were also three people with pale faces.

"I borrowed that for a while so that I could call you."

"I see. So you were the one that called me."

Masaki pocketed the Ring Gear that he had picked up. He would return it later. This must have been the reason why Minamishima looked depressed.

Of course she would be uneasy when her name was used to send an email to someone without her permission.

"Do you hate Minamishima-san?"

"She always does what I tell her to do. I hit her lightly, and when she heard what I had to say she started crying."

".....You!!"

Heat from the bottom of Masaki's gut swelled up.

His anger was to the extent that the hairs on the back of his neck started standing on end.

Ishounuma sneered.

"Too bad, that girl didn't call you!"

"It seems like you haven't learned your lesson from yesterday... even though I said it very strongly. You're not going to reflect on your actions...?"

"Ha! You're a Level 7? You're not strong at all!"

The door closed.

He locked the door with the key.

It was the same as the time on the stairs, four against one. But the three people with him looked completely different.

He got the sense that they were trying to hide behind Ishounuma.

"Hey— are you guys getting cold feet or something!?"

"But, Kusunoki-kun is a Level 7, right?"

"I'm no good here, Ishounuma-san... That guy, even in a fight it's too..."

"Just look at the wall and the ceiling, the power of a Level 6 isn't that significant..."

Ishounuma grabbed the collar of one of them.

"What the hell!? Are you saying that my power is worthless!?"

"Ah, no, I mean the fact that Ishounuma-san is a Level 6 is great but... it's not the same as being a Level 7..."

"It's not the same, huh? The hell am I lower than them!"

"It-it hurts... I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

It was a perfect spot for bullying someone.

Masaki waved his Ring Gear and brought up the window so that he could contact Breaker. However there was an "x" displayed in the place where the signal antenna was. He couldn't call or send an email either. It seemed like it was cut off.

It appeared that Ishounuma's strange application was able to do tricks like this. It was likely that the sound and video recording was being jammed too. It was just like the time on the stairs the other day.

Masaki curled his fingers into a fist.

He had no choice but to fight.

But this time his opponent would definitely use his Dialect.

—The situation had become desperate.

Masaki took off his glasses and placed them in his breast pocket.

His vision became a little blurry, but he would be able to give his all with no hesitation.

This was the third time he would be going against a Globalizer. The first time he was just surprised, but now he had gotten considerably more used to it.

"Ishounuma, let it drop already... you shouldn't get involved with someone that you don't like. If there's something that you don't like about me, then shouldn't you say what it is to me?"

"Ge! Have I acted like a good person up till now!? Alright, I'll burn up your request! I'll burn everything that I don't like down to ashes!!"

Ishounuma threw away the guy whose collar he had grabbed. He held out his right hand towards Masaki.

"Diiiie!!"



"Such an easy—"

He had already checked his steps. Masaki ran towards his left, sneaking round the outside of his right hand.

A human hand wasn't able to aim as quickly when moving in a backhanded direction.

A red hot flaming fireball flew right beside him.

His hair was slightly singed.

An explosion ensued behind Masaki.

The large monitor that took the place of a blackboard in the classroom was seriously damaged.

The power was quite formidable.

Something like a bullet couldn't be taken lightly. It seemed to have enough destructive power to shatter a car into small pieces.

It might have been weaker compared to Shirley's Star Blast, but if it hit human flesh the person would be helpless against it.

"What are you doing Ishounuma?! Using something like that against someone in a fight!"

"This isn't a fight! ...It's your punishment!!"

He shortened the distance.

The fireball's power was obviously a threat.

If it hit him, he would lose his life.

That fact gave birth to tension and unrest.

His heart rate sped up.

However, if he stopped moving he would be an easy target. He needed to keep moving so he wouldn't die.

Masaki didn't carry firearms with him. At any rate, it would become one-sided if he didn't get closer.

"It seems like you're fixated on Shirley, but why don't you try to understand how she thinks!? You make a big deal about Levels and do immoral things—"

"Ha! I can do whatever I like since you're a Level 7! And, I can't stand you! Like I know what is going on inside your dumb head!! "

"Ugh... you...!!"

"Don't worry. I'll get it right away! After I've dealt with you!"

"But will you be able to?!"

Masaki closed the distance between them in three steps.

Ishounuma threw a second fireball.

A ball of fire just as hot as the previous one flew!

It missed.

"Shit! Stop moving!!"

"I stopped moving just before you shot it. It's necessary for you to concentrate before you release it. As I thought, you're not strong at all!"

Masaki shortened the distance so that he was within his reach.

And as he did, he threw his fist.

Ishounuma's cramped face completely changed and he stuck his tongue out.

"Liiiiiiiiike that!"

His opponent extended his left hand.

Was the fireball from before a decoy, and he was going to shoot one now!?

Ishounuma's left hand was right in front of Masaki.

"Idiot! It's my win! Kneel down before me!!"

"As I thought, it seems like you won't shoot."

"What!?"

"That's the extent of your power. If it exploded right before your eyes, you would be putting yourself in danger."

"What the fuck!"

"Alice and Shirley... it doesn't seem like they're able to control the scale of power of their Dialect. Even if you know that you can damage the area if you use too much power, you can't control it. It appears to be quite difficult to do."

"I'm not like them! I'll shoot it!"

"I shortened the distance between us after the second shot, and the power was the same as the first shot. Even at that distance, the explosion was still dangerous. "

"Uu... gu..."

The three young men who were watching the fight between Masaki and Ishounuma close to the wall from a distance away groaned.

"Is he serious? " "How could he see that?" "When the bullet-like fireball flew right by the side of his head...!?" "As I thought, he is a Level 7 human. It's strange!!"

Ishounuma started trembling.

"Shit... I'll shoot it... I said that I'll shoot it!"

"I'll have the advantage if you don't use your Dialect. Give up. And make amends for what you done."

"You...!!"

He was so angry that he could only groan like an animal while his face went bright red.

Right at that moment—

There was a rattling sound at the door.

It seemed like someone was trying to open the door from the other side. But since it was locked, it wouldn't open...

The other students might have noticed that something out of the ordinary was happening if they heard the explosion. Or was it a teacher?

It became quiet after a while—

The door was blown away.

There was a loud sound and then the crushed door flew through the air, travelling across the classroom to the other side of the almost completely demolished wall.

A pale leg was stretched out from the side of the corridor.

In other words, the door had been kicked down. By a girl.

"Masaki, are you safe?"

The person who turned up was Shirley.

"Ah... I'm glad that you weren't near the door."

"Hm? Ah, that's right."

She laughed as if nothing was wrong.

Ishounuma's face was twitching.

"Why are you here... I see, Masaki told you come here in advance, right!?"

"Nope, I came here by myself."

"I thought that something dangerous might be happening. Masaki's reckless."

"That's right. After yesterday, I didn't think that something like this would happen today."

Perhaps it was the girl behind Shirley who found this place.

"...The trace that was keeping track of Masaki-kun's location got cut off over here."

Alice recited calmly.

She must have been a little worried.

"Hey, is it that simple to check up on the location of other people?"

"...Depending on the time and situation."

In place of Alice who dodged the question, Shirley gave an answer.

"In Breaker's headquarters I requested 'an emergency order to monitor you because of abnormal behavior.'"

"Isn't that abusing your power?!"

If they weren't deceiving anyone, and if it was just the two of them, then everything might have been overlooked.

"Well, this time I was saved."

"Really? But it seemed like you were winning?"

Masaki loosened his clenched fist and smiled.

No matter how violent Ishounuma was, he wouldn't do something bad in this situation.

The other three that were with him hung their heads with resigned looks on their faces.

It was settled.

In the classroom full of rubble from the destroyed ceiling and the wall where the window was, everything up to the large monitor had been destroyed.

Shirley was at the doorway towards the rear and Alice was behind her.

Masaki was in the center.

Ishounuma was extremely close to him. Until now, he had been going wild with his Dialect, but now he hung his head helplessly.

The three people with Ishounuma were gathered together near the door at the front of the classroom. They had lost the will to fight from the beginning even though they had been brought along to surround Masaki.

The video and sound recording seemed to be jammed, but the evidence of Dialect being used was left behind.

Next, it would be finished when they contacted Breaker.

It should have been—settled.

Ishounuma touched the Ring Gear on his left hand. A window opened.

There was an image of an apple with angel wings dancing—

Do you eat an apple?

Please touch, if it is as a wish!

Low toned laughter broke out.

Masaki looked at Ishounuma's face and started to get a bad feeling when he saw the abnormal look in his eyes

"What did you do?"

"I'll fucking kill you... and after that... I'm going to torment Sakurazaka until she goes mad with anger and despair..."

"You're still saying things like that?"

"I'll start now!!"

Ishounuma struck the apple in the window.

Yes! You ate an apple!

Welcome to "truth in the world"!!

His body was trembling.

Masaki put himself on guard in this troubling situation.

Shirley shouted out to the three frightened people in the corner of the classroom.

"I have a bad feeling! Run away now!"

The boys screamed and tried to open the door in front of the classroom shaking it and making it rattle.

"Huh!? What's going on?!!" "Hey, hurry up!!" "It won't open!"

On that subject, tape was put on the doors to this classroom outside. The tape on the front door wasn't cut.

Ishounuma was bent backwards as he started to hum.

Happily.

It seemed happy.

Rhythmically.

And he looked calm.

His smile was so big that it seemed like something good was happening.

"Oi, Kusunoki."

"Wh-what?"

He felt pressured but he didn't take it upon himself to move back. Whatever attitude he had, Ishounuma was Ishounuma. His Dialect was fireballs, but his specialty was long distance. He should be safe if he was in arm's reach.

"Are you possibly thinking that you have a chance at winning?"

"Don't deny it... as soon as I got close to you, it was my win."

"A moment ago, I wasn't able to use it right in front of me—that's what you said."

"Yes..."

"Forget about it. The me from a while ago was weak and a piece of trash. Until a moment ago, right."

"What are you... saying?"

Masaki instantly understood from his attitude.

Shirley shouted.

"Masaki, run away!"

"!?"

He jumped back.

Ishounuma drew back his hands until they were a shoulder-width apart facing each other. He created a fireball with both hands at the same time.

All the people watching had their breath taken away.

It exploded.

The explosion that occurred was so big that it seemed like it would devour an entire body.

Masaki was blown away, having received the shockwave of it.

"Uaaa!!"

He fell onto the scattered rubble and pain shot through his shoulders and legs.

Shirley shouted something, but the thunderous sound overshadowed it.

The three young men screamed.

It was fortunate that the classroom's walls and ceiling were no longer there. If the space had been more closed, the occupants of the room would have been seriously injured.

The sound of loud laughter could be heard.

Ishounuma stood uninjured in the middle of the room where the explosion's smoke had faded.

Self-confidence was pasted all over that face.

"Kuha! That power was incredible! But even though I got caught up in the explosion I didn't get hurt at all! Perfect! Now my ability is complete!"

"What the hell... do you mean?"

Masaki rose up from among the debris.

Since he was attacked in such a flashy manner, his shoulder and leg received blows. His uniform was torn, and he was also bleeding.

Shirley rushed over to him.

"Are you alright?!"

"I'm not unhurt, but I'm fine. Other than that, be careful. He started up that strange application again a second ago. That's probably one of its effects... it's like he has become another person."

"Yeah, strong like a changed man! Maybe like a Level 7."

She stood in front of Masaki in order to protect him.

Ishounuma laughed scornfully.

"Am I a Level 7 now? No! I'm more than that! I'm now the ruler of the world!!"

He raised his right hand exaggeratedly.

Alice, who had only been watching from the doorway the entire time, came into the classroom.

"...What a ridiculous thing to say."

"What the hell?"

Alice's eyes and voice were cold.

Shirley also nodded.

"Levels don't matter! Only an idiot would say that he's a ruler or something!"

"Honestly" Masaki thought. You only hear about things like "Ruler of the world" in children's programs.

Alice continued to talk.

"...A truly ridiculous lie... the King of this world is me."

"Eh!?"

Masaki and Shirley's voices overlapped.

Come to think of it, Alice was that kind of person. It was troubling that she asserted it so seriously.

Ishounuma moved his open right hand towards Alice.

"Ha! If that's the case, then I'll blow you away before Kusunoki!"

"...Do you wish to challenge the King?"

"I've changed. I don't need to be frightened by Level 7s anymore!"

"...I'll teach this conceited fool his place. However much you change is inconsequential before my fairies."

Alice took out playing cards from her pocket. When she spread them out the sound of trumpets started.

And out of nowhere the sound of a clock.

Gacchi, gacchi, gacchi...

A large number of footsteps could be heard. The sound of high-pitched chattering, laughter and crying gradually increased in volume.

And then the creak of a door.

Wonder Carnival had begun.

A huge cat appeared out of empty space in front of Alice. It was a Cheshire Cat with a broad grin.

The six-meter long cat started a punch.

Ishounuma extended his right hand.

"Burst!"

The released fireball drove away the Cheshire Cat just before it's cat punch hit its target.

The cat screamed in a un-cat-like manner and vanished in the same way as it had appeared.

No, only its smiling face floated in the air.

It opened its mouth.

Ishounuma held out his left hand let loose another fireball.

A second explosion occurred, and this time the Cheshire cat disappeared.

By that time, the card soldiers were already lined up in front of Alice.

"Gu~uns in position!!!!"

Geese were raised like guns. The word "BANG," spelled out with letters, flew out of their open mouths.

Ishounuma responded to the attack with his fireball; the fireballs and letters of BANG collided then exploded. Countless letter bullets were shot at the erupting blaze that was spreading out.

Flying fish were also flying around.

Gargantuan mice were crawling on the ground towards him.

Countless explosions occurred in retaliation to their attack.

"Uooooooooooooooooooooo——!!!"

Ishounuma screamed.

It was a struggle for supremacy between the two. A Dialect war of attrition.

Can she overcome him? Masaki became anxious and looked over at Alice.

She sat on a giant tortoise and the card soldiers were fanning her with peacock feathers. Certainly, due to the erupting blaze, the room temperature had risen quite a bit but...

"Are-are you okay Alice!?"

"...Do I need to make it known to Masaki-kun too?"

"Huh?"

"...Who do you think I am?"

"Then, can you win?"

"...Naturally."

Alice pointed at Ishounuma. Maybe she had a trump card.

"...Shirley, attack him."

"Huh!"

Masaki was the only one that was bewildered as Shirley raised her voice and gave an energetic "Alright!!"

"What, what are you going to do, Shirley?"

"Nihaha, leave it to me!"

She went into motion like a baseball pitcher.

"One, twooo!! Staaar— Blaaaaast——!!"

The fairies were attacking and Ishounuma was intercepting them with his fireballs ceaselessly. In the battlefield the dazzling flashes made it seem like the sun was falling.

It didn't feel hot.

And yet, the fairies that came into contact with it were extinguished instantly.

Ishounuma spread out his hands and made fireballs while screaming—they were completely swallowed up by the light without achieving any result and disappeared.

"Guoooo!?"

A flash of light came out of the side of Ishounuma's head whose face was twitching.

Was he beheaded!?

Shirley ran in order to shorten the distance before the light disappeared.

"Teiiiyaaa!?"

A flying knee kick sunk into Ishounuma's flank.

"Aaaah!?"

It might have been that because she was light, but Shirley's finishing moves were often high kicks and knee kicks. So he wasn't surprised by the last attack but...

Masaki stared in wonder.

"Did you charge through the flash of light that you shot?!!"

Alice shrugged.

"...Star Blast's effect is that it releases a flash of light. The outbreak time for the flash of light is 0.5 seconds. I'm not limited by it and can keep on shooting it repeatedly."

"What the hell!?"

"...Even if the fireball had become a little stronger... it was only a petty thing. That's the truth."

Masaki remembered him saying that his Dialect had powered up. He thought that he was simply trying to provoke him but...

"Did he really mean it? Even if it became easier to use at a short distance with the increase in power, it still isn't much against Shirley's Dialect."

So she was the only one that could move through the light that could be created limitlessly and held an overwhelming amount of destructive power.

"...She wasn't aware of it but... that was something like foul play."

"Of course."

Foam bubbled from Ishounuma's mouth and he dropped.

Shirley crossed her arms, standing in a somewhat unclear victory pose.

Alice smiled.

"...Strong like a cheat... my 667th piece."

"Wait a minute, isn't she your friend!?"

"...Our friendship is wonderful."

"You, you're really broken aren't you..."

"Hmph... the King doesn't need mediocre things."

"That's worrying."

At the edge of his vision he saw the three boys trembling, grouped together at the corner of the classroom.

They didn't seem to be deeply involved with it. Masaki sighed in relief.

"Even so, you saved me... thanks. If it was just me, I wouldn't have been able to beat up the powered-up Ishounuma. It's all thanks to Alice and Shirley."

"...It was nothing... Shirley won by herself."

"You think? Shirley is strong, but it would have been difficult to protect me and the other three from the fireballs by herself, right?"

"Hmm... well I guess that's true."

"Weren't the fairies protecting them by acting as a shield?"

"Ah, them... I didn't know since they came out and acted of their own accord."

"Really? If your will wasn't passed onto them, don't you think that it wouldn't be strange if even Shirley and I were attacked?"

Alice blushed and looked away.

She was trying to hide her face.

"...Right. That might happen next time. Since it's dangerous, I shouldn't get close. I can't guarantee my own safety."

Masaki smiled wryly.

Masaki stopped talking as it seemed like she was starting to get angry.

In his mind, he thanked her once again.

Shirley took off Ishounuma's bangle.

The jamming application appeared to have stopped and the transmission was restored.

Masaki retrieved his glasses from his breast pocket. Then put them on his face.

The other members of Breaker and the teachers who knew about the situation came running in, and at last the situation reached a resolution.

Chapter 4 Intermission

The man wearing a white coat over a suit opened a window within the dark room, muttering something.

The clock sub-window increased in size. Light was reflected in his glasses.

"Ah... is it already time?"

He authorized the execution of the program task.

There was a space in a certain network.

It was strictly hidden by lots of security.

In that space, the character of the man in white robes was projected. It was a robot with a square face.

It wasn't the type of robot was that was designed to be indistinguishable from a human, its stomach was wide like the design of something like old tin toy robot.

A character imitating the figure of a boy appeared in the immediate vicinity. He had blue hair, his head was super-deformed, and there was a pocket attached to his stomach.

"Yo, Doctor Robo."

Another one, this time a woman appeared. Her head was also super-deformed. And her breasts and bottom were emphasized a lot in the same way.

"Good evening everyone♪"

Next was a penguin. It didn't even look like a human. Furthermore, it was floating cheerfully.

"Cheese!"

The white-robed man slid his finger along the window console.

A speech bubble appeared from the robot.

"Good evening, good evening, long time no see."

In reality, the white-robed man had no expression, as if his face was frozen, but the robot in the network had a grinning expression. In the network, he was friendly.

Woman: "I haven't received an email or call from my boyfriend today as well."

Boy: "You'll get one sooner or later!"

Pen: "..."

Boy: "Robo, I've been doing my best recently, haven't I!"

Pen: "You're attracting attention."

Robo: "You think so? Since the research results have come out, this time I'll make an *announcement*."

Boy: "I'll be looking forward to it!"

Pen: "I'm hungry..."

Boy: "I want to eat yakitori!"

Chapter 4 Intermission

Pen: "*shivers*"

Woman: "It's not a little too conspicuous, is it? Robo-san."

Pen: "..."

Boy: "Maybe it is!"

Robo: "For the sake of our objective, I think it *can't be helped.*"

Woman: "The resourceful Breaker is in that school building, right?"

Boy: "That's bad!"

Pen: "*shivers*"

Robo: "Wahaha, it's *fine*. In the first match, the high school student was strong, but he was also an idiot."

Pen: "If it was an idiot, then I'm relieved~"

Boy: "If that's it then it is fine, but be careful!"

Woman: "Please take care..."

Robo: "*Understood.*"

Woman: "If it is hindered..."

Robo: "*Understood.*"

Woman: "Your head will go splat~"

Chapter 4 Intermission

Pen: "..."

Boy: "I believe in Robo and everyone but, if someone gets us found out, the measures to deal with it can't be helped!"

The white-robed man muttered, staring at the screen.

"Hmph, they're underestimating me. Because of that, you won't be able to reach the truth of the world. I've become a person who's arrived at it. It will be fine for me to watch and guide mankind."

Robo: "Thank you, everyone."

Chapter 5-1

Three days later—

At lunch, Masaki and the others were summoned to the headquarters of Breaker.

The headquarters were underneath the school building.

He imagined that it would be a really strict place, but contrary to his expectations, it was only a large room with tatami mats spread out. It was about 350 square feet and had white mud walls. Masaki and the others were gathered in the center of the room.

When he sat down seiza-style on the tatami mats, his mind mysteriously calmed down.

Despite wearing a skirt as part of her uniform, Shirley sat down with one knee up and her elbow resting on that knee.

She might not have sat in such a way if there had been other people around. She had a wild feel like a relaxing tiger.

For some reason, Alice was holding her knees as if she was in PE class.

Midorikawa-sensei was sitting cross-legged right across from the three who were sitting lined up. She was wearing the same jersey.

Green tea appeared before all of them.

Masaki lifted the teacup calmly and... took an enthusiastic sip from it.

Shirley didn't drink anything since she didn't like very hot food or drink. She preferred to gulp it all down at once after it had cooled down.

Alice seemed like she didn't want to make any noise while drinking, she knew that it was good manners to do so but she drank quietly.

Masaki put his cup down and looked around him.

"This is a little surprising."

"What was that?"

Midorikawa-sensei had a cigarette in her mouth.

Cigarettes in modern times didn't need to be lit and gave off only a little smoke when used. Although they had become more moderate in terms of addictiveness and health damage, minors still weren't allowed to smoke. It was a strange feeling, seeing someone who looked like an elementary school student with one in her mouth.

"I imagined headquarters would be a place with lots of computers."

"It used to be like that in the past. Eventually holograms became more convenient. We can access any necessary information whenever we like through a window."

Midorikawa-sensei flicked one of the windows beneath her hand with her fingertip.

It flew back about four meters and increased in size to about 60 inches.

"Well, in practice the color isn't as good compared to a monitor, but my job doesn't involve appreciating or evaluating movies. Being able to share information quickly is a priority."

"That's right."

"Since everyone in the committee has access to their own terminal, we got rid of the things that were in the way."

"That's rational since this work doesn't involve staring at a screen for a long time."

"...Is it rational for there not to be any chairs? It's uncomfortable."

Alice said it as if it was a soliloquy.

Midorikawa-sensei shook the cigarette and answered.

"The number of people gathered changes depending on the situation. If our members are having a discussion they need to pay attention to whoever is saying something. It would be troublesome to deal with the clattering of bringing chairs out every time. Since we're Japanese, tatami and green tea are fine. "

"...That is your preference."

"Our irritating advisor can do whatever she likes to the room!"

It seemed like the main reason was her preference and everything else was an afterthought.

Masaki gave a strained laugh.

On that subject, Midorikawa-sensei got up and went towards the depths of the room and brought out some documents from a cupboard. Paper documents were rare these days.

"Kusunoki, is this your first time coming to headquarters?"

"Yes."

"This is the committee's registration application. The people on the Canaan Board of Education are idiots to have such a thing as paper documents in this day and age."

"Haha... well if it's necessary I'll write."

It had been a long time since he had filled out a form with pen and paper.

Midorikawa-sensei increased the size of the window, displaying an image of a hospital room.

"Well, this is today's agenda!"

"Ah, it's Ishounuma."

It had been three days since he was stunned by Shirley.

"...He still hasn't regained consciousness?"

"It seems so. We wanted to get some information out of him about that damned suspicious application."

"...And he went too far."

"Eeh!? He went to that extent to refuse to say anything!?"

"...Like this, the culprit has given his testimony."

"I'm the culprit!?"

"Now now you two. His coma probably wasn't caused by him refusing to give information."

Midorikawa-sensei nodded at Masaki's words.

"You've got good intuition. I was told by people giving him medical care that it seemed like the application was tampering with his brain and might be the reason why he can't get up. No matter how you think about it, it's something illegal."

Alice smiled with her whole face.

"...It's APPD¹."

"Uh-huh."

All the students in Canaan were given Ring Gears, but outside of the school there were similar devices spread around. The application used those as an intermediary, and by sending particular signals to the brain, it could have an effect that resembled narcotic drugs and could cause side effects.

The manufacture, circulation, and use of it was prohibited worldwide.

Midorikawa-sensei opened up different windows one after the other.

"I feel that he's also showing similar symptoms to Ishounuma. Come to think of it, Sakurazaka also caught this guy, right?"

Masaki also recognized the guy. It was the wiry, slender young man who chased him on the first day of his transfer.

He was sleeping.

"Micchan-sensei, he didn't refuse to say anything after what happened?"

¹ Application Drug

"That's right, he surrendered after you destroyed the wall. Stop wrecking the school in order to intimidate people. This isn't the set of a comedy movie. It's quite expensive just to replace the panels."

"Nyahahaha!"

"Don't gloss over the issue with that laugh! It's all coming out of Breaker's budget. Because of your punch, my afternoon snack is in danger!"

"You're cheap Micchan. I can pay for that myself."

"No way. The confectionary in Canaan is expensive."

Most of the daily necessities were made underground, so Canaan was self-sufficient regarding those, but luxury items like snack food were transported from the mainland.

"If I don't eat Oreos every day, I'll die."

"Wasn't there Ritz in the cupboard?"

Shirley brought out a red box. She opened it up.

"You!? You idiot! That's my lunch!"

"Really... *munch**munch*"

"Don't eat it! Why did you eat it!? Hey, why did you eat it!? Didn't I say it was mine!?"

Her eyes were seriously starting to tear up.

Alice sighed.

"...What a good adult."

"Midorikawa-sensei, please don't get angry about the Ritz. If that was your lunch then after this you can go to the cafeteria with us."

"Are you saying that I shouldn't get angry about the Ritz!? You'd better apologies to Nabisco!"

"...Can we go back now?"

"No, wait a minute. You can leave after this."

The conversation was finally back on track.

The Ritz that was the teacher's lunch was set out in front of all of them like it was tea cake.

If you really considered it—if it was being bought using Breaker's budget, this was a good way to use it.

The tea and salty snack food was quite a good combination.

"Even the medical group investigated whether or not it was APPD. Not just Alrescha, they did a close investigate of Canaan's entire network. They said that it might do something like strengthen Dialect, so it might be a possibility."

"It's possible? Ishounuma did become really strong..."

"Since the Ring Gear record was jammed. They said that there's not enough evidence to call for an investigation in all of the academy cities around the world. But I warned them."

The floating academy city Canaan was in Japanese territorial waters, but other countries had their own floating academy cities. Or their facilities for Globalizers could also be underground or in the heart of a mountain.

Around Level 3, the person would be restricted from being a tourist and would have to change schools; the procedure seemed to be necessary since problems with maintaining security and national defense arose at any level above that. Masaki had never been abroad, so he had only heard about it.

Alice said that she was from England.

Did she become a Globalizer after she arrived in Japan? Or maybe there was in some kind of situation that made her transfer to Canaan?

Alice muttered.

"...Who would give a nitwit APPD?"

"Well, that's the question."

Midorikawa-sensei groaned.

Shirley continued to munch on the Ritz.

Masaki thought about it.

"Hmm, I was thinking, could it be someone in this school building? Since it's only happening here and events like this haven't occurred in the other school buildings."

"...In Alrescha, there are 2790 students, 180 teachers and 203 staff members."



The students were Globalizers. Half of the teachers were Globalizers. Only one person in the staff was one. All of them had Ring Gears.

Midorikawa-sensei grumbled while biting into the "cake."

"There are about 3000 suspects. That's too much for Breaker to handle. Mmm, mmm."

The huge list worried Masaki.

"Can you narrow it down to people who are likely to give away APPD?"

"...If there were traces on the net, we wouldn't be having this annoying conversation."

"Right. If it was passed on through the net, we could find evidence left in the records of the school server and we wouldn't have to go through so much trouble."

"...It's direct access."

"Yeah. If the APPD application was left on the Ring Gear, we would be able to examine it, but it deleted itself from the Ring Gear. It's pissing me off!"

"...Can you identify a person that might have been able to meet him from the location records?"

"How far back should we go? I don't know exactly when it was received."

Masaki had an idea about that.

"What about the day it happened, or after school the day before?"

"Hm? Ah, now you mention it, you guys had a dispute the day before, right? Could he have got it then?"

"I can't confirm it but... if he had it at that time I think he would have used it."

"Mmm... I should be able to narrow it down a lot."

"And the incident on my first day here... I think that guy also met someone then. There's no record of it since I didn't have a Ring Gear, but he was talking like he was having a conversation with another person."

"Did you see the guy? Could he have been talking to himself?"

"I'm not completely sure but... I heard the other voice faintly."

"Hmph."

Midorikawa-sensei opened the catalogue of location information and narrowed the candidates down to the time and place.

She nodded.

"There's one candidate."

"Huh!?"

"Kusunoki Masaki, it's you————!!."

"Eeeeh!?"

"...You're actually the criminal."

"Masaki is the criminal!!"

"Hey hey, Alice and Shirley... please stop. The point is that I didn't have a Ring Gear at the time of the first incident."

"Nihaha, it's a joke, a joke."

"...Nothing could be done if I was on the verge of death from the APPD that was handed to me."

"Forgive me."

Midorikawa-sensei kicked away the window.

"Daaamn! If there are multiple culprits, I swear I'll give up!"

"Can the criminal jam the GPS tracking? And rewrite it with fake data?"

"That's impossible. The Ring Gear's signal is picked up by the sensor in the school building... it's possible that it could be a dummy."

"Ah!"

"What is it, if it's the Ritz, you've already...? If you make a move on the Chip Stars² in the cupboard, I'll seriously kill you. Pay for it yourself."

"Is there a person that was by themselves at that time that wasn't moving and could have had a conversation with him?"

"Mumumu... that search criteria is troublesome. Can we stop now?"

"Sensei, let's do our best!"

² Japanese version of Pringles

"I get it, I get it. I tried to say that. Let's see..."

Her small finger tapped the hologram.

"There are a lot of people who fit... this is a large campus so there's just too many."

Midorikawa-sensei groaned.

Was it a dead end?

At that moment, Masaki was struck with inspiration.

"Erm... when you exclude the students and staff members... what do you get?"

"Well, why do you think that a teacher is the culprit, Masaki?"

"Let's see... would a student or staff member pass on an application that makes Dialect stronger to Ishounuma? That's what I'm thinking."

"I see" Alice nodded.

"Ishounuma is level absolutist. He treats people with low levels like trash. He doesn't think of the staff members who don't have an ability as human too. So there are some people who wouldn't have handed an application that strengthens Dialect to such an irritating person. "

It was hard to think that the staff members with no ability that he had made a fool of or the students around him who were treated badly by him would give him more power.

If he had fought with the APPD and Alice and Shirley hadn't been there—Masaki would have been killed.

Even though he had no doubt that would satisfy Ishounuma's selfish greed, he still didn't want to image what would happen after that.

Even for Ishounuma, he wouldn't have used the application unless he trusted the person that gave him the APPD.

The expression in Midorikawa's eyes changed.

The number of people displayed in the window decreased.

"Hey, Kusunoki... I wouldn't have guess that it would be that guy... It wouldn't be strange for the two APPD users to have placed their trust in a teacher, they were alone at the corresponding time and were barely moving. There's only one person within the 3173 people in Alrescha that fits."

Masaki fixed his eyes on the names displayed in the window and had his breath taken away.

Shirley grasped her fists tightly.

Maybe Alice had already considered that possibility, as she only let out a small sigh.

Midorikawa-sensei hit the window. Since it was a hologram, it disappeared without any resistance.

"That bastard—"

Chapter 5-2

There was a knock on the door of the empty classroom.

"Please come in."

"....."

The person opened the door in silence and walked into the middle of the room. It was a girl with golden hair, Alice.

Waiting inside was the homeroom teacher of Year 2, Class A — Hariya Gen-sensei.

"You wanted to have a conversation with me?"

"Yes."

"It's surprising to have you rely on me."

"...Depending on the time and situation, right?"

"It would be good if I can be helpful."

They were in classroom 2804. It was a disused classroom on the 28th floor that wasn't closed.

6:00PM—

It was already after school and the sun was setting in the west.

The sound of the restoration work on classroom 2808 which had been destroyed by Alice and Ishounuma could be heard in the distance.

Unlike Alice's apartment, it wasn't designed so that whole rooms could be completely replaced. The damaged pillar was being repaired and the walls and ceiling were being rebuilt.

Alice gazed outside the window.

"...Recently my pieces have been misunderstanding things."

"Your pieces?"

"...I'm talking about Sakurazaka Shirley. She dared to state her opinion to me, the King, and she behaves selfishly... in addition, she destroyed my room. "

"That's terrible."

"...She deserves to die."

"Do you want me to mediate between the two of you?"

"...I need to make it known. That I'm the King."

"You should calm down a little."

"...If you don't approve, then this will be the end of the conversation."

Hariya was lost in thought for a while.

Alice gazed out of the window expressionlessly.

"Can I listen to a more concrete story a little longer?"

"...Shirley's Star Blast lacks elegance, is wild and you could even say that it is like desecration... I can't accept the possibility that it might reach me, the King."

"Well. Sakurazaka's type specializes in combat and in addition she's Level 7. I doubt you can find anyone like her throughout the world, let alone Canaan."

"...That may be so, but even if we fight each other, I'll win. However, I'm the King so any kind of fight must be overwhelming with beauty and grace."

"Really?"

Hariya shrugged.

He was amazed that Alice revealed her feelings but he didn't challenge her.

"...I'll allow you to help me."

"Haha, no, my Dialect isn't particularly battle oriented. At most, it could be used in place of a summer electric fan."

"...You're under Level 5. I'm not expecting you to have war potential. But, I heard that you had something interesting."

Hariya's faced convulsed at Alice's words.

"!?"

"...Secrets are meaningless before the King."

"Wh-what... are you..."

He said in a wrung out voice.

Alice didn't drop her aloof manner.

"...I'm saying that in order to overpower Shirley, I need to use the thing that you have."

"No, that's..."

"In this situation, shouldn't you give me its name?"

Hariya's face bewilderingly cycled through twitching, being lost in thought, scowling, and seeming like he was about to cry.

How long would he be worried about it?

A crooked smile floated onto his face.

"Fu, fufufu... gufufufu..."

Hariya waved his left hand a window opened.

He operated it at a high speed.

A high-pitched sound spread out reaching the depths of her ears.

"...What is that?"

"I'm just making sure."

"...Is it the image and voice recording jamming?"

"Yes. And this is what you wanted."

Hariya extended his left hand. On his Ring Gear was the design of an angel's wing attached to an apple.

Alice also produced her left hand.

It was like the arm of a white doll. A rose relief was engraved into the silver bracelet.

Hariya's finger crawled along the surface of her white skin.

"...Is this action necessary?"

"Ah, no, it's fine... there should be collateral if I'm collaborating with you."

"...If you're requesting a reward from the king, the servant needs to achieve results first."

"Guh."

"...Do you wish to die?"

"Haha, I understand. But, after I hand it over to you..."

Alice stared at him with cold eyes.

Hariya wiped the sweat off his face with his right hand and his lips twisted.

"It is a type of application that will delete itself after being used once. This is my original. You won't be able to obtain it again if you kill me. You wanted to win against Sakurazaka, right? After that, will it be necessary to have that strong power. Wouldn't you ignore me?"

"...That is for me to decide."

Hariya touched the Ring Gear, interpreting Alice's word as affirmation.

There was a tiny electric sound.

"Kukuku... please accept it. With that, you'll arrive at the truth of the world, Fruit of Wisdom."

The application was copied.

And right after that—

The specially made trap that was built in five hours by the programmer group that was the pride of Breaker activated.

The application was restricted to being frozen so that it wouldn't be able to delete itself, and the system that was analyzing it at the same time judged it to be illegal.

The freeze said "Success" and the verdict was "Illegal."

A conversation window opened.

Midorikawa-sensei materialized in it and she drew closer to Hariya.

"Yooou worthless teacher!"

"Wha!? Midorikawa!?"

"Breaker Help Cat get innnnn——!!"

The classroom door was kicked down at the same time the shout in the window.

As usual, Shirley barged in.

"Teyaaa—!!"

And following that, Masaki ran after her. This was Masaki's first job as a member of Breaker.

"Hariya-sensei, you're being taken in on the charge of manufacturing and distributing APPD. This is being done based on the laws of Breaker, if you have an objection then submit a report within 90 days. Furthermore, if you show resistance, it is likely that defensive measures will be taken according to the Peace Preservation Act."

Masaki's Dialect didn't have any combat potential. So he wanted to be useful in situations other than that, so to start with, he memorized the rules. Shirley put her hands on her hips and stuck out her chest.

"Harii-sensei! I misjudged you! The API for the students... handing over stuff that could make them murderers and put them to sleep! Anyway, I'll never allow it!!"

"...If you resist, you will die."

This was the speech of Alice & Shirley, Help Cat.

However, their opponent couldn't be dealt with by ordinary means.

By Hariya's facial expression, he still had some moves left.

"Kukuku... what's the matter? What are you charging me for? Well, if you're going to restrain me, you won't be able to get it will you... however, if you're wrong you won't get away with some running as your punishment, you'd better be prepared for that."

Of course, the proof had already disappeared from that Ring Gear.

Midorikawa-sensei ground her teeth from the middle of the window.

"Tch... I just finished checking the materials used by the class and investigating the PCs in the lab. The data and development tools are probably hidden somewhere."

Alice lifted her left arm. She pointed at the Ring Gear.

"...If you want evidence, it's right here."

"Yeah! That's right! Harii-sensei passed it on to her so we have it!"

"Kukuku... what are you talking about? What did I hand over to whom?"

"...Is it the sound and video recording jamming application?"

"That's no good at all, what do you lot think you're saying? Can you stopping making false accusations! Even for Breaker, isn't that being too discourteous!? If you're going to say that I'm doing something illegal, show me the evidence!! The evidence!!!!"

Masaki asked.

"In other words, if there's evidence, you'll admit to everything that you've done?"

"Ah, of course! If the evidence has been recorded by your Ring Gear!"

"Alright."

Alice exchanged looks with the others and took out a device about the size of the pen from her dress pocket.

She pushed the switch.

A high-pitched and quiet noise flowed from it—

"...What is that?"

"I'm just making sure."

"...Is it the image and voice recording jamming?"

"Yes. And this is what you wanted."

"...Is this action necessary?"

"Ah, no, it's fine... there should be collateral if I'm collaborating with you."

"...If you're requesting a reward from the king, the servant needs to achieve results first."

"Guh."

"...Do you wish to die?"

"Haha, I understand. But, after I hand it over to you..."

"It is a type of application that will delete itself after being used once. This is my original. You won't be able to obtain it again if you kill me. You wanted to win against Sakurazaka, right? After that, will it be necessary to have that strong power. Wouldn't you ignore me?"

"...That is for me to decide."

"Kukuku... please accept it. With that, you'll arrive at the truth of the world, Fruit of Wisdom."

Hariya's face paled.

His face started convulsing and his fingertip shaking.

Sweat was spouting down his face.

"Wh...at...?"

"...You are too foolish."

Alice's word said everything but Masaki supplemented it.

"There isn't a anything within the degrees of what a teacher can think of that a student can't think of too. If the recording is being jammed in the same way over and over again, a counter measure needs to be found. The solution was simple; carry a recording device other than the Ring Gear... a teacher wouldn't be on the lookout for that."

"Ah, guh... uuuh..."

His groans were like the moans of an animal.

And then he started muttering to himself.

Shirley who had been standing with her hands on her hips all that time stepped forward.

"I don't completely get it but with that, you're arrested!"

Hariya looked up.

"...These... damn... brats."

"Harii-sensei?"

He waved his left arm.

A windowed opened up and displayed the word "Cipher".

After that, an image that he recognized appeared.

An apple with angel wings—

Masaki shouted.

"Don't let him press it! Shirley!!"

"Okay!"

Shirley ran up to him.

Hariya snorted.

"As I thought, you're foolish Sakurazaka-kun. You should have shot your Dialect at me. You missed your only chance of victory."

Shirley almost reached him before she hit an invisible wall.

Hariya didn't move an inch yet she was blown away.

Her back struck the wall of the classroom.

"Ginya!?"

"Shirley!?"

Masaki ran up to her. He remembered something happening like this in Alice's room.

In the same way as then, she got up immediately and put herself on guard.

"I'm fine!"

"That's, that's good."

"...You're ridiculously sturdy."

Alice let out a sigh of relief while she said that.

Hariya's shoulders shook as he sneered at them.

"Did you forget that I'm a Level 5 Globalizer? Of course, you guys are Level 7. No matter what situation you're in, you won't consider anyone else a threat. With this I will leave behind the days where that arrogance irritated me."

His right hand fell onto the window.

He ate the apple with angel wings.

Furthermore, several more windows opened up around it. They all became the Fruit of Wisdom.

"Fuhahahahahaha! My brain has finally arrived at the truth of the world!"

With only his right hand sweeping across, he ate all of the apples.

The APPD still hadn't been analyzed yet. Masaki and the others didn't know what kind of effect using it several times would exert.

If that action was repeatedly powering up his Dialect, the result would be terrible. Masaki shuddered.

Thinking along the same lines, Midorikawa-sensei raised her voice from within the window.

"Withdraw! Help Cat withdraw!"

"...I refuse."

Alice answered in a flat tone.

Could she be lacking the thing called a sense of fear?

"Don't say something stupid! His battle potential isn't clear so don't fight him!"

"...I can't run away... because of something like that."

"I won't let you get away with such unreasonable things! Even if it's Breaker!"

"...That's not it."

"What!?"

"...The reason why I'll fight... is because I, Alice Clockheart, am the King of the World."

After she said that, Alice closed the window with Midorikawa-sensei in it.

She threw a glance at the classroom wall.

"...Masaki-kun, you had better escape to a safe place."

"Of course, I'll refuse. I can't leave my partner and childhood friend behind when I know they're in danger."



"...Right."

In the worst case, Masaki was thinking that the both of them could escape to his Dialect.

Masaki was planning on staying in case there was anything he could do, even though his Dialect was the type that couldn't be used at moment's notice when being attacked by an opponent.

"...Shirley, are you by any chance sleeping?"

"I'm awake!"

"...Use your full power."

"Okay, now you can leave it to me!"

Shirley's right hand started to shine brightly.

"Kukuku... I who have finally arrived at the truth... being a Level 7 won't be enough for you to win!!"

Hariya waved his right hand and created a shockwave.

Normally, they would likely have been thrown and smashed into the wall.

Alice took out playing cards from her pocket and threw them into the air.

That was the beginning of Wonder Carnival.

A giant sea turtle appeared and became a shield. But it smashed through the walls and windows.

Shirley swung her fist.

"Toryaaa!! Staaaaaar Blaaaaaaast!!"

A flash of light exploded through the area.

In retaliation, Hariya once again swept his right hand across.

A collision of Dialects occurred.

The flash—

Pierced through everything.

It passed by Hariya, travelled between the groups of buildings and soared into the sky.

"What the!?"

His expression stiffened.

Shirley was running through the flash.

"Ryaraaaa——!!"

"No... way... why!? I've obtained a power equal to God!"

Shirley threw her right fist.

"If that's the case! Then my fist can hit even God——!!"

Hariya's face was distorted.

He was blown away.

Into the wall.

Despite that, Hariya's body shifted towards the window.

"Gu... grrrr... you! Monsteer!!"

He allowed his body to fall from the window, outside of the school building.

This was the 28th floor. If he fell, it wouldn't matter how much his power was strengthened by the APPD.

But, Hariya's body was floating in the air.

Each person only had one type of Dialect; an exception to that rule hadn't ever been discovered. Even if it seemed to have multiple effects, it was only the application of one effect.

Perhaps, he was using the ability to make shockwaves in order to float.

Hariya was about to escape by flying through the air.

Shirley looked back.

"Alice!"

"...I'm on my way."

Chapter 5-3

A large shadow fell onto the school building, blocking the setting sun.

It came around flapping its large wings. It had the upper body of a hawk and the lower body of a lion, a griffon!

It stopped by piercing its industrial machine like nails into the school building.

"At last, my turn has come! At last, yours truly has been used! Since I'm being dispatched for a rush job, if it's troublesome leave it to me! Come, get on, get on quickly!"

"We'll get on in a minute!"

Shirley jumped onto the griffon while carrying Alice in her arms.

"...Can you get on by yourself?"

"Alright!"

Masaki promptly jumped onto the griffon.

At times like this, Shirley didn't have to worry about Masaki. No-one else was likely to rely on Masaki, but she alone had faith in him.

Alice pointed in the direction that Hariya had escaped.

"...Follow him."

The griffon kicked off from the wall of the school building. It spread its large wings and flew away into the sky.

"OK! Leeeeeeeeeeeeet's goooooooooooooo~~~~~!!"

Hariya flew weaving his way in between the standing buildings like they were trees in a forest.

They chased after him with the Griffin flying at the speed of an arrow. It was fast but it was bigger too. It had no choice but to stop and go around the narrower spaces between the buildings.

"Aah!? He's getting away! He's getting away! Keep on going birdy!"

"...Can you get smaller?"

"Soon, very soon, I'll reach... my limit, soon... *pant pant*..."

"Are you getting tired this early!"

"Look, he's going down!"

Masaki pointed.

Hariya could be seen heading towards the ground from the space between the buildings.

The next time he looked—

He was on the ground.

He was near Canaan's Administrator Tower. In other words, he was approximately at the center of the floating academy city.

It would have taken 20 minutes to cross the distance by bus, but it hadn't taken them even one minute.

Hariya let off shockwaves from his feet.

Pieces were scattered.

A hole was created.

And, it was all done in one move.

He smashed through the multiple sturdy foundations supporting the surface of the ground creating a hole. From there, he jumped.

Masaki pointed.

"Underground! He escaped underground!"

Shirley shouted and grabbed the feathers at the back of the griffon's head.

"Birdy! Down there—!!"

"There's still more to be done~~~!?"

The griffon eyed the hole that Hariya went through and nose-dived towards the ground.

Mixed with a scream, Masaki shouted.

"The hole is too small!"

"I've got it!"

Shirley released a flash towards the ground.

A thunderous roar broke out.

Right after that—

The griffon broke through the ground.

The explosion blocked his view.

And then the collapsed fragments of the foundation started to rain down.

Before he knew it, the hatted mice appeared and protected Alice from the flying fragments, then disappeared with a squeak.

Once again, Masaki didn't think badly of her use of Wonder Carnival.

"Let's see... if it's cute and able to talk, you'll use it as a shield, do they have much resilience?"

"...They'll be back to normal on the next day."

"Well, that's right. It's like an illusion."

"...Actually, like Masaki, even I..."

He wasn't able to catch the rest of her words.

As soon as they went down, they were attacked by a shockwave. Masaki and Shirley, who was holding Alice, jumped off from the Griffon.

"GYAOOOOOOOO!!"

Giving its last screams of death, the Griffon disappeared.

Masaki, Alice and Shirley checked that each other were safe.

Chapter 5-4

The place where they got off the griffon seemed to be a factory.

It was a dark place.

The ceiling was extremely far-off at about 20 meters away.

Hariya opened the hole and Shirley made it bigger.

It had become extremely wide. Several thick pillars interrupted the field of vision and the walls weren't visible.

There were several conveyor belts and robots making clothes automatically.

"...This is the second underground level. The food should be made below the tenth underground level. And right at the bottom, the 30th underground level is where the water purification facility is."

"H~mm?"

"...Why do you think that I explained this, Shirley?"

"Erm, so, so that I won't damage it?"

"Ah, of course, it would be a disaster if the food manufacturing facility and the water purification facility were destroyed."

"...That isn't wrong, but it isn't the correct answer either."

Alice declared.

"...What I wanted to say is... that it doesn't matter if you destroy the facilities around here. "

"O~kay!"

"No, try not to destroy them!"

Masaki's Ring Gear received a message.

A window opened.

It was Midorikawa-sensei.

"You guys! Are you alright!?"

"Yes."

"That bastard escaped to a really bad place!! It's no joke if a powerful Globalizer starts to destroy the underground facilities!"

"We also talked about it. In particular, if we don't protect the food and water facilities..."

Apart from that, anything else could be destroyed is what the conversation was about.

"It seems like that bastard Hariya is heading towards the Center Pillar."

Shirley started running.

"I've got it!"

"Hey, Shirley!?"

If she was the type of person to stop when being called, it wouldn't have been difficult. She was running at a superhuman speed.

"...She runs fast."

Alice dropped one card to the ground while she muttered.

An ostrich taller than Masaki appeared.

"...No."

She dropped another one. He heard the sound of hooves and an armored army horse appeared running.

It stopped in front of Alice and then mysteriously lowered only its torso so that it was at the height of a bench.

When Alice sat on its back it returned to normal.

Shirley didn't manage to catch a glance of the figure behind the pillar.

"...Masaki-kun."

"I'm going as well of course!"

"...We're partners. Therefore, we should allocate roles. You identified Hariya and contributed to obtaining the evidence. You should leave the rest to me."

"Huh!? Shirley might be able to win by herself but... if Alice goes as well I won't have any doubt about it..."

From the fight that he had seen a little while ago, Shirley was stronger than Hariya even with his increased power.

He had thought about a place where an attack could be made, but his opponent had escaped.

If Masaki also came along, Alice's horse would be slower, and if he needed to be protected in the middle of a fight, he would probably be a burden.

"...The work that you've done so far isn't bad for a manservant."

"I was your manservant?"

"...Is there a person who can stand at the same level as a King?"

"Ha, haha..."

It'd be fine for her to be silent if she was worried about him but didn't want to say it.

She wasn't frank.

Alice brushed the war horse's neck gently.

"...Go."

The war horse snorted then started to gallop.

He was left alone.

It didn't bother him since he was in a hurry, but he was hearing the repetitive sounds of the conveyor belts and robots moving. It was an unexpectedly noisy place.

There was nothing wrong with him returning to school now.

Rather, he might be praised.

However—

"I'm not strong like Shirley and might be a hindrance for Alice... but I can help when it comes to tidying things up."

Masaki decided to go after the girls so that he could help out in his own way.

Da, da, da....

"Woo."

Do, do, do, do, do...

"Huh!? An ostrich!?"

Come to think of it, Alice called it out a little while ago but didn't want to use it so left it alone.

"...Woo."

He got a strange impression when the ostrich cried out such a voice.

"I was also left behind. Well, I hope we get along with each other."

He couldn't understand the bird's expression but the ostrich followed Masaki.

The lone human and the lone bird went after the two girls.

After a short while, the Ring Gear rumbled to indicate the arrival of a message.

Midorikawa-sensei appeared in a window.

"Kusunoki!"

"Ah, how is everything? Has it been settled already?"

"Where are you now!? If you're still in the underground facilities, leave now!"

"Eh? What about... Alice and Shirley?"

"Reinforcements are on their way but, since Hariya was nice enough to destroy the Center Pillar elevator, it's gonna take some time."

Midorikawa-sensei's expression was unusually hard. And she ignored Masaki's question on purpose.

He suddenly got a bad feeling.

"What are they doing now!?"

".....They're on the south side of the 15th underground level... there are dangerous facilities there. There are security devices there, but I don't know if Hariya has broken through them! If worst comes to worse, everyone might have to leave Canaan!"

"Huh!? What on earth..."

"It's the Generator Plant! It's completely isolated and is the latest style that can be left to robots to maintain. It can't be contaminated and there are no accidents, but acts of terrorism are a different story! Worst comes to worse, Canaan will be gone in a month!!"

"No way...!?"

"Kusunoki, where are you heading, too!? No, it doesn't matter. Come back to school right now!"

"Un-understood."

"Yeah."

"I'll come back with Alice and Shirley!"

"Huh!?"

"Knowing those two, they'll be chasing after Hariya. Right!?"

"Even so, what's going to happen if you go!?"

"I don't know. But I can't leave them alone."

"Don't be stupid! There are security devices! If they haven't been stopped you're gonna end up dying before you even get there, you know!?"

"But still... it's because I'm Alice's partner and Shirley's childhood friend."

He closed the window with Midorikawa-sensei shouting.

He launched the Ring Gear navigation.

He didn't know where Alice and Shirley were but... he searched for the underground 15th level—it was a pitch black area with "Generator Plant" displayed on it.

When he looked for directions it said "No Entry." After he acknowledged the warning three times, the navigation started.

The destruction of the Center Pillar elevator was reflected on the data. An x mark was displayed and another route was suggested.

—It was a route where he would have to walk one kilometer then go down two kilometers by the stairs.

He felt dizzy.

But he wouldn't stop. He'd absolutely never give up.

While he was running, Masaki contacted Shirley.

No answer.

Next, Alice.

A window popped up.

Alice had a tired-looking face.

"...What is it? I'm really busy right now."

"Alice! Are you alright!?"

"...Masaki-kun is as rude as ever. It's impertinent of you to worry about the king—
—!?"

The window was shaken.

Alice's had a look of shock on her face.

Lots of noise started rising.

The image disappeared.

But her voice could still be heard.

"...Gu."

"Alice, are you in the Generator Plant!? Could it be that you're not fighting there!? You and Shirley's power could completely destroy the area."

"...That's why... what are you saying?"

"Run away!"

"...If I leave that low-life villain at large... I wouldn't be qualified to be the King."

Masaki squeezed his fist.

What a stubborn person!

However, Shirley would probably give the same answer, no matter how disadvantageous the situation was , she would keep on trying to do what she thought was right.

".....Masaki-kun, it's fine... go back to school."

"I refuse."

"...You're not listening to the King's orders... I've made a terrible miscalculation. A person like you... isn't appropriate... for me."

"Alice!?"

"...Goodbye... I'll declare 'Partner Cancellation'."

It was a voice full of pain.

Masaki's chest tightened.

"Really, that's too bad Alice... but the agreement of both parties is necessary to cancel the contract. I don't plan on quitting as your partner!"

".....It's already too late."

Her voice vanished.

The noise disappeared along with it.

Masaki was still on the 2nd underground level.

They must have already been on the 15th underground level fighting against Hariya.

"I need to be... faster... I hope those two... are safe..."

The stairs were still far away.

The speed of Masaki's running on the map showed that he still had one kilometer ahead of him to go, it was irritating because it felt like he was staying in one place.

The ostrich running behind him gave a large cry.

"Woooooooo!!"

"Huh!?"

The ostrich flapped its wings.

"Woo, woo."

"Wh-what... are you going... to give me a lift...!?"

"Hey BOY!! Stop running sluggishly and get on my back!"

Chapter 5-5

Masaki got onto the ostrich's back...

Or rather he grasped its neck with all his might so that he wouldn't be thrown off.

He couldn't count the number of times that his foot hit the wall when it was running down the stairs, the constant pain had him in agony.

But it was fast.

Thanks to that, he was able to arrive at the 15th underground level in no time.

It was a large cave that was a hundred meters in width and height.

It was like he had gotten lost in a country of giants.

There were also wriggling pipes that seemed thick enough for a car to pass through, and there were several rails running along the floor for the sake of transporting equipment.

There was a black and yellow striped line drawn on the floor.

The Ring Gear gave him a warning.

Entry is forbidden beyond this point.

From what Midorikawa-sensei said, there should have been some security devices...

There were lots of warning windows displayed in the air.

"Woo!"

The ostrich continued to run without faltering.

It crossed the black and yellow lines.

When they crossed the warning line, they entered the defense zone. Even though he had prepared himself, Masaki shuddered at whatever had happened here.

What was there was—

A large number of disk-shaped robots and completely and utterly destroyed.

They might have been attacked by Hariya's Dialect or Alice and Shirley.

It was as if he had found a graveyard of machines in the land of giants. The ostrich was breathing heavily while running over the rubble.

"Are you okay?"

"Woo."

"According to the navigation it's a little further... about another 300 meters..."

"Wo...o!? Heey! Let's fly, BOY!!"

The ostrich shifted its body then opened its large wings.

Masaki was thrown off of the ostrich due to the sudden movement.

"Ah!?"

A disk-shaped robot appeared from the rubble underneath his feet.

Could some of them still be working?

"Defend... defend..."

The cover of the disk rose and a muzzle peeped out from the middle. A heavy firing sound resounded.

It was a rubber bullet.

But it was about the size of a baseball and was going around 300 kilometers per hour.

The ostrich was shot and it gave a painful scream.

"Wooo...!!!"

"Ah!?"

"...*cough*... Good luck..."

It disappeared.

Did it take the bullet for me?

Alice said that it would revive tomorrow, but even so Masaki was sad about it.

He placed both of his hands on the rubble then stood up.

He had thought that the security robots were all disk shaped, but as they got ready to attack, all of them were lifted up by something that looked like a large octopus.

It was around six meters wide and three meters tall. There were about eight spheres supporting the disk.

Masaki spotted the muzzle that was shooting out high speed rubber bullets.

What would happen if one hit a human directly?

"Please retreat... when you retreat, the defense will be stopped... please retreat..."

The synthetic mechanical sound flowed through the area.

So, if I go back would it leave me alone?

Masaki took off his glasses and placed them in his breast pocket.

He took a deep breath. Then let it out.

"...I'm sorry but... I need to get through!!"

He broke into a run.

"Advance confirmed... defend... defend..."

The sound of heavy shots could be heard.

Masaki evaded them.

The warning and the sound of movement were enough for him to change the direction he was running in just before the shot was fired without much difficulty.

The spheres rotated as he ran past and the octopus robot drew closer to him.

Is it trying to kill me by running me over!?

"Oooooooooo!!"

He sped up.

If the robots had been unhindered on a flat floor, the outcome might have been different. However, the abundant ruins gave Masaki an advantage.

He ran faster than the machine's predictions.

"Defend... defend..."

A firing sound.

He had already avoided it.

He continued to run.

How many meters do I have left? He was sprinting as fast as he could in a zig-zag, trying to get past them, but...

Mechanical sounds could be heard in front of him.

Lots of them.

"Huh!?"

"Defend... defend..."

"Please retreat... as you retreat, the defense will be stopped... please retreat..."

"Entry to this area is prohibited. Please leave immediately..."

Including the ones that were partially destroyed, there were about 20 or 30 of them. They were pushing aside and treading on the remains of the robots, gathering themselves into a group.

There were still this many robots moving! That must mean it's an important facility.

The feeling of hopelessness stopped his feet from moving.

He could die.

"It's not... a joke... I need to go forward!"

Masaki wiped away the sweat on his forehead.

He took a step forward.

*****"Advance confirmed"*****

Chapter 5-6

"Ha...ha...ha...ha..."

Blood was dripping at his feet.

His leg felt like lead due to his wounds and fatigue.

The wall that isolated the Generator Plant had been mercilessly torn away.

He entered through the gap of the squashed door.

"Ha...haa...ha...ha...ha..."

The robots stopped attacking once he had crossed the defense line so that they wouldn't damage the facilities they were supposed to protect.

Masaki sunk onto the floor having used up all his strength.

He had slipped through the swarm of robots and finally arrived at the Generator Plant.

He was close to his limit.

For a moment, he was about to lose consciousness.

"! That's no good! It still... still isn't finished yet!"

He stood up.

Walked.

All five of the individual walls were distorted. He went through the gap—

At last he was inside the Generator Plant.

The dazzling light made his eyes squint.

Chapter 5-7

In the middle was a metal box. Even if was slightly narrower than the tunnel, its width was still considerable.

The place that he immediately entered was a work space, deep inside were about six cylindrical power generators in a line. It looked something like a battery supply in a battery box, but one of the pipes was enough to supply a substantial amount of electric power.

There was a sloping aisle around that power generation equipment that was used for maintenance. Since they had to get around inside this vast facility, the workers used Turret Trucks.

There were pillars scattered around in the work space.

Since there lighting in every direction, it was quite bright, but it didn't change the world of cold metal.

Moreover, a lot of the pillars were knocked down. The floors and walls were distorted in such a way that it seemed like a massive hammer had struck them repeatedly.

The battle was continuing.

The figures of Alice and the others were there. Now, the huge sea turtle was being used as a shield.

"...Preferably... should we blow up all the facilities?"

"Haa...haa... we can't. Everyone will die."

Shirley warned her.

Those two seemed to have that kind of relationship. Alice was smart but irrational, and Shirley didn't understand difficult things but had common sense.

They were confronting the man with the white doctor's coat—Hariya.

He had his back to the generator equipment.

"Kukuku...fuhahaha! Go on, try and do it! If you can do it, you should use that overpowered ability of yours!!"

He was practically uninjured.

Of course, Alice and Shirley were afraid of damaging the Generator Plant if they attacked him.

Masaki ran up to them.

Hariya was the first person to come to this place.

"Huh!? Yo-you why!?"

"You're still a teacher! You're holding everyone in the academy city hostage and trying to kill students in cold blood! You've put people into comas with your strange experiment!"

He ran while saying those words.

Alice looked back with a shocked expression on her face and Shirley smiled.

"...Masaki-kun, why did you come!?"

"Ah! Masaki! You finally came!"

It seemed like Alice had really thought that Masaki had returned to the school. She honestly didn't have any faith in the partner that she chose herself. That was cruel.

And Shirley didn't doubt that Masaki would come. She didn't say anything while she was running, yet still believed in him, which was cruel.

In any case, it was cruel.

No matter what, he couldn't leave those two alone.

"I'll definitely help out!!"

Masaki ran.

The distance between him and Hariya was about 20 meters. His opponent's face grimaced.

"Uuu... don't come here!!"

He had the advantage because he had his back to the generator equipment.

If Masaki invited him to Rose Garden, that situation would be turned around.

"This is something that I can do..."

However, as a teacher, Hariya understood everything about Masaki's Dialect. At this distance, he couldn't do what he wanted to him.

"You'll die... before you get any closer!!"

Hariya swung his right hand.

A shockwave was created. The tremors in the air were just like a wall.

"Huh!?"

Its range was wider than Masaki had expected. He had observed Hariya's attack several times with the intention of grasping the range and width... its power had been increased drastically.

Maybe he used the application Fruit of Wisdom again while fighting here!?

Masaki realized his mistake.

—A human body wouldn't be able to withstand the shockwave unless an ability was used!!

"U-uoooooooooo!!"

"Masakiii!!"

Someone jumped into his field of vision from the side.

It was Shirley.

The shockwave arrived.

"Gyah!!"

Her body was blown away. Her hair was a mess and red splashes of blood fluttered around.

Masaki lost his footing.

"Ah!? Shir-Shirley!?"

Since she took the attack for him, Masaki hardly got hurt from it.

Alice rushed up, already too late.

"!?"

Her breath was taken away.

Shirley had fallen and was lying face-down on the ground, red blood spreading out around her.

She wasn't moving.

Alice's lips trembled.

"...Is... is she... dead?"

"No way! Right, Shirley? Hey, you're still alive, right!?"

Masaki got down on his knees next to Shirley. He took her hand. Her energy had completely disappeared and she looked frail.

His hand was wet with blood.

Hariya laughed out loudly.

"Kukuku...fuhahaha! Anyone can die... even a Level 7!"

Alice turned on her foot to face her opponent.

"...I'll kill you... I don't care about whatever happens around us... I'll..."

It was a low sharp voice.

Her face had become pale and her fingertips were trembling. She was like a carnivorous animal that might throw herself at him at any time.

It wasn't like the girl who was cool and composed, it was like she was another person.

Masaki raised his voice.

"Alice!"

"...Don't get in my way... I'll..."

"She's alive!"

"Eh?"

Alice, whose mood was like a drawn bow string, stared in wonder.

Masaki laid Shirley on her back.

She was bleeding heavily from her side and her school uniform was dyed deep red.

But she was breathing.

In a fluster, Alice got down on her knees beside Shirley. She didn't seem to mind that her blue dress got stained with blood.

"...Shirley? Shirley?"

"Uhn..."

"...Is she... alive?"

Shirley opened her eyes slightly at the sound of her name being called.

Her voice faintly escaped from her lips.

"It's no good anymore."

"...Stop saying stupid things."

Alice supported Shirley's head with both of her hands, raising it slightly.

Masaki grasped her hand tightly.

"Don't give up! Hang on, Shirley. You're the kind of person who doesn't give up, right?"

There was no power remaining in the fingers that were wet with blood.

Shirley sighed.

"Masa-ki...."

"What is it?"

"I'm hungry..."

"Yo-you, your stomach has been injured!!"

"I want to eat a hamburger... ramen, curry, omurice, yakisoba... katsu curry."

Would katsudon be fine instead? How much does she want to eat curry? Masaki nodded, putting up with it like he was the straight man in a comedy act.

"I've got it! I'll let you eat anything you like! If you die here, you won't be able to eat anymore delicious food right!?"

"Nooooo waaay!!!"

"...Stop messing around."

Alice let go of the head that she was supporting with her hands.

It was only a small height but the back of Shirley's head fell onto the ground.

"Ow~!?"

Shirley rubbed her head.

Alice stood up.

"...You're always messing around, Shirley... and you don't finish things off."

"Nn-heey!"

Shirley stood up while wiping the tears from the corners of her eyes.

Masaki supported her.

The bleeding was heavy and she might have been injured in other places in addition to her side. He actually wanted to let her rest but, in any case, she wouldn't want to sit back.

That was her personality.

"We need to end it quickly."

"Nihaha, that's right! You know me really well! As expected of you, Masaki! Hey, when this is over, you'll let me eat as mu~~~ch as I like, right!?"

"Okay, it's a deal. I can make you whatever you like."

"Nyaha!!"

Shirley formed a fist with the smile that filled her whole face.

Alice took playing cards out of her pocket.

"...Everything is in place... we only need to put on the finishing touches."

"Yeah!"

Hariya's face twisted.

"You lot don't understand. You don't understand anything. You're as wretched as you are foolish."

Am I about 20 meters away?

If the generator equipment wasn't behind him, Shirley would be able to finish him off in one blow.

Masaki put his fist on his heart.

If he could concentrate, this distance would be enough to target Hariya with his ability.

However, he couldn't fail.

Alice spread out several cards like a fan and brought them to her lips.

"...If it's you, you can do it. Anyhow... it's because you're my partner."

"Ah..."

Her cheeks seemed to redden slightly. It seemed like she had retracted the "Partner Cancellation" from a while ago.

Shirley cried.

"Do it, Masaki!!"

"Right!"

Masaki focused.

With an angry look on his face Hariya, swept his right hand across aggressively. He Globalized a shockwave that gouged the surface of the ground while growling.

"Do it if you caaaaaaaaaan—!!"

Alice tossed a card in front of him.

"...If it's a small fairy, it will be your victory. If it's a large fairy, it will be our victory... Will your luck be greater than the King?"

"Kuha, little girl, who is the King?! You fool! You fool! I'll make you disappear!!"

A shockwave drew close.

The fairy that Alice summoned—

It was a small man.

It was wearing a tuxedo and a hat, and was shorter than Alice. The fairy stared at the shockwave that was approaching right before him.

"Oh!?"

This fairy couldn't be a shield.

Masaki was prepared for it to be blown away. At least it would protect Shirley who was hurt.

The small man screamed.

"Alright! Shooowtime!"

It threw the hat it was wearing.

Cards poured out from within it. Thousands and thousands. They jetted out, spreading out in front of him.

It was just like a wall.

The shockwave hit it.

Countless numbers of the cards were blown away by the wind and dispersed, but, their opponent's attack didn't reach Alice and the others.

Alice smoothed down her disheveled hair and muttered.

"...That's a fine hat."

"HAHAHA! That's right! The Mad Hatter's hat is always a fine hat—"

The small man disappeared before he finished speaking.

The preparations were completed.

It only needed to be put into operation.

Shirley nodded deeply.

Alice glanced at him from the side.

Masaki spread out his hands like an orchestra conductor.

"Welcome—"

Chapter 5-8

The world was rewritten.

The dangerous Generator Plant disappeared and an orange brick cottage could be seen in the distance.

The cold metallic color surrounding everything was no more; instead they were surrounded by a green flower bed with red, white and yellow roses in bloom.

A pleasant fragrance drifted softly in the air.

The breeze felt good.

The blue color seemed to fall out of the sky.

The gentle sunlight rained down.

This was Rose Garden.

And today, Masaki, Alice and Shirley weren't the only people in the round plaza; there was another person.

Hariya ground his teeth.

"U-guh-ke... ridiculous!"

Masaki was pleased that he had been able to invoke his ability successfully.

"Phew, you don't have to worry about damaging the floating academy city here."

"Uuu... why!? According to the examination two weeks ago... your effective range should be ten meters"

"I don't know a lot about Innate Fantasy¹ but... I don't think that it's unnatural."

"It's natural!?"

The expression on Hariya's face twisted.

Masaki, who was now in a waiter's outfit, adjusted his glasses with his fingertip.

"If I have a mysterious power, isn't it natural that the moment for me to try it out, despite my inexperience, is the moment when I need to protect the people important to me?"

"Guh!?"

Since he doesn't seem to be able to understand human hearts like that, he will just continue to start up terrible incidents like this, thought Masaki.

Shirley beat her fists together.

"If you're here, it's alright for you to use your full power!"

"...Of course."

"Erm, hey, it would be nice if you don't wreck everything too much... if it gets broken, I don't know if it will be repaired or not."

"...Fufu... there's no need for you to worry, Masaki-kun."

"Really?"

"...Shirley... you're not allowed to go easy on him. Don't worry, give your all."

¹ Innate Fantasy is the kanji that is normally associated with the furigana term Dialect. In this case, only the kanji is used, but it can be considered equivalent to Dialect.

Simultaneously, there was a shout.

"Alllriiiiiight!!"

Her first shone pure white.

It cast light.

At the same time, she charged at Hariya.

The spear of dazzling light, dashed through the roses and pierced the cottage.

"Aah..."

Masaki covered his eyes.

A quarter of the rose garden was demolished in an instant.

The shockwave that Hariya threw wasn't a problem. Shirley charged and drove her first forward.

Hariya screamed.

"Guoooo! You don't understand the magnificence of my study! This is surely the future for honest humans and the only way to save the Globalizers! Why can't you see that the thing you smashed with your hand is the promised holy land!? The Fruit of Wisdom is the great wish that will protect everyone from the end that's destined to be a calamity. There's nothing else! This is the wish that was left behind for us!!"



"Didn't you knooooooooooooow——!!"

Shirley swung her right fist up from below and drove it into Hariya's stomach.

Her opponent fainted in agony.

Then she lifted it up and swung it!

Hariya was blown away.

The white flash soared towards the sky.

Shirley punched up.

"Haaaaaa!!!! Whoever the bad guy is, whatever reason he has, we Help Cat won't allow them to get away with it!!"

".....But we're under Partner Cancellation now."

"Nyaaa!?"

Shirley cried out in a sad voice and Alice gave a refreshing laugh.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

Epilogue – A good day for drinking tea

On the next day—

The school was closed and the weather was good. It was as hot as ever outside.

Masaki had come to Alice and Shirley's room again, as it had a state-of-the-art kitchen.

The girls were waiting for his dish at the counter table. Masaki was cooking.

"Even if it's Shirley, isn't that amount of food overdoing it?"

"I'm fine! I'm not a child anymore! Hurry up, hurry up!"

Shirley, who was talking in sing-song voice, had bandages wrapped around her neck, torso and limbs. There was a cast on her left arm.

Alice was concentrating on her tea.

"...One portion is fine for me."

"That's what I was going to give you. Alice eat the curry. Shirley is having a hamburger, curry, ramen, omurice, yakisoba, katsu curry... hey, isn't that strange?"

After all, curry and katsu curry were similar dishes.

Alice was expressionless.

"...Strange? Are you talking about Shirley's stomach? Or her brain?"

"No, there were two curries... well, it's fine."

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"Masaki, Alice, you don't understand! Curry and Katsu Curry are two different dishes!"

"...It seems like I will never understand for all eternity."

For the time being, each portion was on the small side and ramen was provided as the appetizer soup.

It had become a strange set of dishes, as all of them were main courses.

Shirley picked up her chopsticks.

"Waaai!"

"Is it difficult for you to eat?"

"Nihaha, I'm fine, I'm fine!"

Shirley had a gash on her stomach, and her ribs and left hand were fractured. He didn't know how many other small injuries she had.

It was because she took a direct hit from the shockwave.

She had protected Masaki.

The strength of Shirley's Dialect was unrivalled when it came to attacking, but it was ineffective when it came to defense. The doctor said in wonder that the sturdiness of her body was the reason she survived.

She spent the night in intensive care but had already recovered enough to go back to everyday life. The scars also seemed to disappear a few days later.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"Nihaha! There's no need for you to worry, I'm fine Masaki! I often get this injured, but since it's the fingers of my left hand that are broken, it's not too inconvenient. Ah, come to think of it, Alice is left-handed, right?"

"...Yes."

"Eh, really? Yet you always use your right hand when eating?"

Even now, she was holding the tea cup with her right hand.

"...Because it's table manners."

"I see."

Of course in restaurants, knives and forks were lined up on the right hand side, and in cafes the handle of the cup was turned to the right when placed on the table. It might have been a little unstylish to try to eat with your left hand.

"...Experience."

"Ah, well you're free to use your left hand if you want to."

".....Hmph. It's strange... Masaki-kun, have you ever seen me using my right hand freely?"

"I just got out of the bath before... Ah! No, I, I forgot."

"...Right."

She glared at him and then Masaki went back to cooking.

The topic changed.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"This morning, did Midorikawa-sensei get in touch with you?"

"...Yes."

"I didn't really get what Harii-sensei said. *slurp**slurp*~~~"

"...Don't make any noise while you're eating."

"Why? I'm slurping because it's delicious."

"...It's bad manners."

"Alice hasn't tasted real ramen before!"

"...I'm not interested... as I thought, it seems like Hariya is unconscious now."

"Yeah, it seemed like Ishounuma was too, maybe that's what happens after that APPD is used."

"Nyaha, that's scary... *slurp**slurp*~~~"

"...It serves him right."

He resisted agreeing with her.

"At least Hariya-sensei used it knowing what might happen to him. Ishounuma and the other guy might be victims... but they didn't need to hurt innocent people—here's the omurice."

Masaki's omurice wasn't overcooked and was shaped into a perfect semi-circle with nothing drawn on it. It was a half-moon floating on a white circular plate.

Shirley waved her hands.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"It's here!"

"Would you like ketchup? Or will you eat it plain?"

"Ah, I want you to draw a heart!"

"I didn't do it like that but... well I might as well try."

Since Masaki was the type that fussed more over the taste than the appearance, presentation honestly wasn't his strong point but—

He was able to draw it surprisingly well since he was used to making cakes.

A heart on the omurice. And because there was some left over ketchup he wrote "Shirley" as well.

"How about this?"

"Wow!? In other words, does this mean 'Masaki LOVES me'!?"

"No, it means 'Shirley's portion.' "

"I see."

Alice stared at it when she caught a glance of it from the side.

"What's up?"

"...Ah, no... well... I..."

"Huh? What is it?"

"...I... the... omu... no... it's... nothing."

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"Does Alice also want an omurice like this?"

"...!?"

Her eyes glittered.

Her face was as expressionless as ever.

"I thought that it would be more delicious if you had the curry tomorrow, well since I'm making it right now, please wait for a bit. I brought plenty of ingredients. This apartment has a large fridge."

"...Yes, I'll wait."

"No~, this is a long-awaited meal. It's really fun."

"...Hurry up."

"So this is the latest kitchen system. It's glittering like it's new! I want to live in a place with a kitchen like this."

"...Then you should live here, right?"

"Eh!?"

Masaki instantly turned around to face Alice.

She looked down and brought the teacup to her lips. This was the gesture she always used when she wanted to hide her expression.

Shirley raised her right hand which was holding a spoon.

"Yeah! Do you want live here too, Masaki!? This place is full of empty rooms!"

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

".....It is."

"Ah, yeah, that's right."

"Even on days off, Breaker can be dispatched in an emergency. Since we're a team, it'd probably be convenient if we live close to each other."

"That's true."

"I'd be happy if I could eat delicious food like this every day!"

"Hahaha... so that's your motive? Well, it doesn't feel bad to have my cooking praised. I'll think carefully about it."

"Yeah, think, think!"

"...Good job, Shirley."

"Nya?"

They finished eating.

Although they had been on the small side, Shirley had eaten all five portions.

"Uuu, I'm so fuuull..."

"Are you alright? Have you got a stomach ache or is your fracture hurting?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine. Ah, I want to take a bath."

"What's wrong?"

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"If I eat a lot, I end up sweating. And, I brought a new shampoo."

It seemed like Shirley had left a shopping bag in the corner of the room.

It's surprising that she has a girlish side like being picky about shampoo, Masaki thought.

Alice stood up.

"...It can't be helped. I'll assist you."

"Thanks."

"...Since you're hurt, you'll get special treatment. This is the only thing that can't be left to Masaki-kun."

Masaki shook his head furiously.

Of course, he couldn't help her!

The cast covering Shirley's left arm was waterproof, so she didn't have to worry about if getting wet, but she wouldn't be able to wash her right arm she couldn't use her left arm. It was quite inconvenient.

If it was a hospital or old people's home, there would be robots available that washed people's bodies, but as one would expect, that couldn't be arranged for just a few days.

At any rate, Masaki couldn't help her out with her bath.

"Nihaha! I wouldn't really mind!"

"I would."

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"...That kind of shamelessness isn't permitted in this house."

Masaki half-rose to his feet.

"Then, I'll get ready to..."

"Eh!? I've been waiting for this for so long, I want to eat dinner too, Masaki!"

"...There's still some curry left."

"That's right. If you made that much, wouldn't it be troublesome for you to make dinner again once you get home!?"

"Eh, is it fine?"

"...Yes."

"Actually, you don't need to go back home! Why don't you stay here?"

Masaki nodded with a bitter smile.

"For now, we can have dinner together. Ah, can I borrow your kitchen for a little longer? I brought the ingredients for a cake."

"...You can use the kitchen as much as you like. I don't use it unless I'm making tea."

"You and Shirley don't cook? All of the equipment looks new..."

"We always eat out or just get take out."

"...Since Masaki-kun said that he was going to cook, I prepared the tools that seemed to be necessary."

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

"That's right, thanks!"

"...You're, you're exaggerating."

Alice turned around.

"I didn't imagine that you brought it for my sake. Thank you! Since you'll be waiting for me to make a delicious cake, you can take a bath, and then you'll be able to eat it once you're finished."

"Ri~ght!"

"...Please make some iced tea as well."

"You want iced tea as soon as you get out of the bath!?"

"...There's a Super Freezer."

"Yo-you even have that."

If he had that, it would probably be easy to make frozen desserts.

Alice and Shirley went to the bathroom.

"Now, what should I make..."

He had planned on making and had bought ingredients for a strawberry tart.

However, since he was making it himself, he had a high degree of freedom on how to do things like mixing up the flavor.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

Since their stomachs might still be full, it'd be better if it was light rather than heavy so that it could be eaten quickly—

He suddenly noticed.

The shopping bag Shirley had planned on using was left in the corner of the room.

The paper bag was sealed and didn't look like it had been opened. There was a translucent bottle inside it.

"Hmm, well, I should probably put it in front of the door, right?"

Alice and Shirley had switched from the rooms that they normally used, and there were now doors with the labels "RESTROOM" and "BATHROOM".

It was quite convenient.

He placed the shopping bag in front of the door.

"Shirley, you forgot something! I left it in the corridor, so open the door in ten seconds—"

"Alright, Masaki! Thaanks!!"

The door opened.

Why did it open?

Even though I said to wait for 10 seconds—!?

"Huh? What's wrong?"

Shirley was standing there, not even wearing underwear.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea

The appeal of her curves, her tight waist and her voluptuous thighs jumped right into his eyes.

The only thing covered was her left hand wrapped in the cast.

She was smiling.

It was a so-called happy-go-lucky smile.

Shirley probably wasn't embarrassed by Masaki seeing her naked. The problem was the girl behind her.

Although a towel was hiding the important places...

Alice was a little further away in the bathroom and he saw her face go bright red once again.

Her thin, white body was as beautiful as always.

Her porcelain-like skin didn't have the slightest blemish.

"...A...Aah..."

Once again, she screamed.

Epilogue - A good day for drinking tea



Afterword

Thank you for reading "Fuyuu Gakuen no Alice and Shirley."

I'm the author, Murasaki Yukiya.

As one of the launching series of Overlap Bunko, this publication made me nervous as well as happy.

This work is the story that takes place in the floating academy city Canaan.

A place where people have awoken to a special ability (mainly children who have yet to grow up) and live isolated from the rest of society.

Masaki who awoke to his abilities much later when compared to everyone else and was judged to have the highest level, but truthfully had the peaceful hobby of making sweets.

And Shirley, the girl who doesn't concern herself about being fawned over and doesn't try to attract attention, and the mysterious, self-styled "King of the World" girl Alice. This was the story of a reunion and the meeting of a boy and girls.

It will make me happy if you can enjoy it.

By the way, I don't think I have favourite between Alice and Shirley. As the story advances, I think that will be settled somehow or another...

Or will there be a new character!?

Afterword

It has that kind of feeling... I plan on continuing this series in a second volume. It's fine for that to be revealed!

I'm anticipating this from Overlap Bunko.

I've been planning it thoroughly but I wanted to try and give a preliminary announcement of the next volume recklessly—

I think that everyone has noticed, but this time one person used her Dialect recklessly and is no longer a member of Breaker—Sakurazaka Shirley's actions are brought into question by the higher-ups.

And someone appears who is getting closer to the Breaker Supporter Koori who laments over her low level...!?

There will be a change in the relationship between Masaki, Alice and Shirley.
(That's the plan.)

The people that I'd like to thank—

The illustrator Shirabi-sensei, thank you very much for these wonderful illustrations. Also for granting my rash demand of "Put the three of them onto a cool, fairy-tale like and lovely cover," thank you very much.

Sugimoto Tomoyuki of NARTI;S, thank you very much for the stylish design.

Yoshimi Sakai who was in charge of the illustrations of the floating academy city Canaan that became the setting that expanded from my vision, thank you very much.

Afterword

The main editor Igarashi allowed this volume to be published with no issues. It seemed like a long time, it seemed like a short time... I'm looking forward to continuing to work with you.

The editor-in-chief Nagata, thank you very much for giving me the important opportunity of being part of the label launch. From now on, I'll keep on doing my best!

Everyone in the editing department of Overlap Bunko and everyone else involved. And the family and friends that supported me.

And finally, I give my utmost thanks to everyone who finished reading this.

Thank you.

If you don't mind, I'd be happy to get your impressions. For Overlap Bunko, when you respond to the questionnaire, it seems like you'll be able to access a limited site called the "Afterword's Afterword," for more details, see the offer page after the afterword.

And, there's a simple questionnaire on the author's site.

The URL is <http://murasakiyukiya.net/>

I'm waiting for your opinions, thoughts and any additional comments that you'd like to make. Thank you for your help.

お手にとっていただき、まことにありがとうございます。しらびと申します。
ゆきや先生の書かれる、アリスとシャーリーが可愛くて
イラストを担当できること嬉しく思います。
2巻以降主人公の征貴を巻き込んでどういった関係になっていくのか、
個人的にも楽しみにしています。



シャーリーの髪をおさげ型にしてみました

Credits

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著者サイト → <http://murasakiyukiya.net/>

しらび

埼玉在住のイラストレーター

健康になりたいです